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THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS

BY MARK GUY PEARSE

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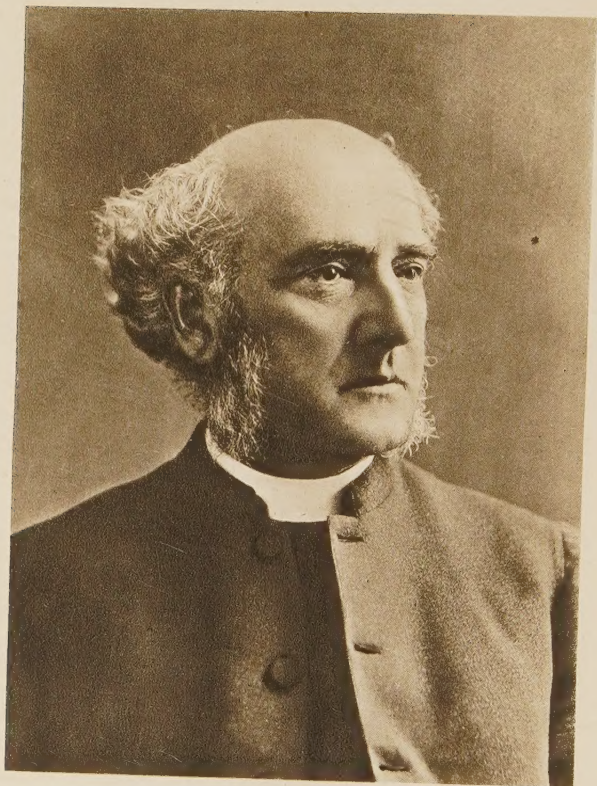
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THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS

“ A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory.”—*St. Matt.* xii. 20.

I

THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS

THE words must be taken in connection with their context. They set forth with exquisite imagery the gentleness of Jesus; but it is, in the first place at any rate, not the gentleness which stoops to take up the bruised reed and make it whole again. The words occur in the very midst of the controversy with the Pharisees. He and His disciples had gone through the cornfields on the Sabbath day; they were hungry, and as they went they plucked the ears of corn and eat them. The Scribes and Pharisees came murmuring that He had blasphemed the Sabbath. He silenced them instantly and defended His disciples from their murmurings. But there He stopped. He did not push His advantage, but withdrew. He left them to go forth to take counsel against Him, and went with His disciples away in the quiet parts of Galilee. He would have no wordy tumults with them. He did not strive nor cry,

neither did He lift up His voice in the streets. He carefully guarded His miracles from becoming the subject of any public tumult. In every way He who could so easily silence His opponents, He who could by a glance have destroyed His enemies, carefully avoided all controversy and conflict.

This then is the meaning of the words, "The bruised reed shall He not break, the smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory." He would not put forth His power against His foes. This was the method of His life. This was the way in which He should conquer the world; not by strife nor cry, but by an infinite and unfailing gentleness. Look at it all along His life.

If He would uplift the world the first thing is to make life sacred, the very beginning of it. Infanticide was scarcely a crime at His coming anywhere but in Palestine, and even there without any ado or great horror, Herod, to quiet his uneasy fear, can send out his soldiers and slay all the young children through the coasts. Here then is the problem,—How shall He make childhood sacred? How uplift and hallow the world's opinion of the little child? How bring all the world's tenderness and pity about the babe, and gather all the world's might for the protection of the little one? Shall He go forth and tell with sweet words of their charms, a champion of their claims? Shall He go forth with

fiery indignation against their wrongs and hurl angry threats at all that degraded and dishonoured them? Come and see how it is done. He Himself comes as the little Babe of Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Controversy conflict, terror, destruction,—where are they? He cannot break a bruised reed, He cannot quench a smoking flax, He who lies as the Babe upon the mother's bosom. Thus He uplifted and hallowed the little child and made it a thing almost divine,—of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus He made motherhood sacred, and left it the mightiest power to soften and ennoble men in all the world.

Look at the thirty years as the lowly carpenter at Nazareth. His voice is not heard, He does not strive nor cry. And this is the next great want of the world,—to declare the sacredness of humanity apart from the clothes it wears and the house it lives in. Wanted a force that shall make man everywhere a creature dignified and ennobled. At Christ's coming in every nation but Palestine the working-man was a slave, denied the common rights of humanity. Now what shall the Saviour do? Shall He strive and cry? Shall He utter fierce denunciations, and make glowing orations and sublime poems about liberty? Do not think for one moment that I speak lightly of all this. God forbid. Thank God that there is a power in the word of orator and poet. And none ever spake sublimer things of our mankind

than did Jesus Christ. But He did not win His ends as an orator. He did not achieve His victory as a poet. What then? Shall force become our remedy? Shall He bid men arm and strike for freedom, and shall He lead them forth to liberty? Shall He march and threaten with sword until the reluctant tyrant yields to fear? *He shall not strive nor cry.* The roll of drums and flutter of flags and shout of battle and fierceness of opposing forces is not that of which He will avail Himself. He will live as the Carpenter. The little carpenter's shop with the rough beams above and the chips and shavings littering the floor, and the sunshine slanting through the dusty air—He will make this *the Father's House*. And He bending in the sweat of His brow, toiling with chisel, saw, and plane, will make the commonest work as much the service of God as that which the angels render before the throne.

This was ever His method. It runs through all His life-work. Thus He would teach that men were all alike dear to God. At His coming it was a thought that had never entered the mind of either Jew or Greek or Roman. The Jew was the favourite of Heaven, the rest of the world were hopeless heathen; the Greek was the cultured philosopher, the rest of the world were barbarians; the Roman was the conqueror of the world, everybody else was an inferior creature incapable of sharing his privileges or dignity. How shall all this be swept away?

Shall He lift up His voice against it in oration, sermon, poem, discourse, controversy? Shall He smite and break, that He may force upon the reluctant world the truth of brotherhood? Nay, He will Himself become the Brother-Man. He will sit at meat with publicans and sinners. He will make as much of a publican as of a Pharisee, and welcome a sinner as gladly as a Scribe. He will go home to dinner with Zacchæus, and talk with a Samaritan woman at the well, and stay to heal a poor heathen woman's daughter.

So would He win His victory. He would not avail Himself of the eager patriotism of His nation, that would take Him and make Him by force a king. Never would He put forth His almighty power to smite His enemies. Once, indignant that the Samaritans had refused Him their hospitality, John's love kindled to a blaze, and he begged that fire from Heaven might fall and avenge the insult. But the Master rebuked His disciple gently, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of." And when Peter would have fought for his Lord with the sword, he is bidden to put it up. He is come *not* to destroy, but to fulfil.

And it is true always as it was true then. No force can ever help Christianity, but the force of the living love, the Christlike presence. The only authority it knows is the authority of love. Whatever has tried to enforce Christianity has always destroyed it. Fines, imprisonments, the stock, and the pillory,

slitting noses, and cropping ears, the dungeon and the stake, have been the methods by which men have tried to teach the beauty and blessedness of Christ's holy religion, ever with greater disaster to those who suffered than to those who punished. Nor is it by crying any more than striving. Oratory, philosophy, all kinds of pompous show and splendour have never made and can never make a Christian. That is the first meaning of the text. "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall He lift up His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, the smoking flax shall He not quench, till judgment go forth to victory." His victory is ever the result of exceeding gentleness.

Turning the words round we find yet another message in them. *Here is a blessed word for every one.* If the gentleness of Jesus be such that the very fierceness of His foes could not provoke Him to anger or strife but moved Him only to pity, like the rough wind of autumn that shakes down the golden fruit from the bough which it assails—what gentleness hath He for those who fain would come to Him and know Him as their Lord and Saviour. *A bruised reed will He not break.*

A bruised reed. What a common, useless thing it is! Away by the lonely pool, where the bleak winds blow and bend the fragile stems, there grow the reeds, things without much beauty, without much

worth at best, uncultured, the wild growth of muddy soil, lapped by the water and shaken by the breeze. And among the very many here is one broken; trodden down by some heavy foot, or withered by decay and beaten by the blast, it hangs a bruised reed. Or according to others it is the reed of the pan-pipes, split and spoilt for music, dumb or hissing only under the breath of the player, spoiling the tune and undoing all the rest of the reeds. A bruised reed—what else so worthless? And a smoking flax, the light gone out, the red spark only left, and that making a smouldering smeech offensive to everybody. Not only no good, but a positive annoyance. A smoking flax will He not quench.

Without unduly pushing the figure there are two causes of the bruised reed and of the smoking flax—*circumstances or weakness; accident or neglect.*

The bruised reed—trodden down by circumstances. How many there are born as bruised and broken reeds—trampled under-foot from their very childhood, beaten down by coarseness and harshness. Faith in anything or anybody has never had a chance of growth; trust has never learnt to thrust itself forth. Sworn at and struck at, poor striving hope has been starved to death long ago. To such there is a depth below despair, a dulled indifference; for them there is no good anywhere or in anything. Set them alongside of others whose faith has always been encouraged, whose hope has been fed and burns

brightly, for whom encouragement waits at every step. This very difference from others is another burden and bruise. Everything is against them,—ignorant, with evil habits formed before choice had any voice or the will had any power. Ah, would to God that we could get at these bruised ones, not good enough often to come to any service. For these our most gentle and gracious Master comes on His way. The bruised reed He will not break. It means He does not scorn any. His love holds each one dear to Himself. He never turns any away as past mending or beyond help. The bruised reed, bent and more than bent, broken, though not broken off: what can be done? Who will stay to trouble about a thing like that? And what can one do for it? Careful proping and binding and a thousand outward appliances, lo, there it is bruised and broken still. Ah, He will stop and stoop to the reed. Look at them to-day on the verge of the frozen river, dead, bruised, broken, a matted mass of rottenness—withered by the frost, beaten by the snow, trodden under foot. But come again in but a few weeks' time and look at the reeds. How they live and flourish, every head uplifted, the tall straight stem decked with the green leaves. Not from without, but from *within* has come the transforming power. The resurrection life of spring has quickened the root, and heaven and earth have met together to uplift and bless and beautify the bruised reed.

That—that, and nothing less than that, is the power of the Lord Jesus. He is the root of a new life; He is a resurrection-power in the midst of men. His word is not pity, not help, not teaching; it is more, infinitely more, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*" He gives to those who come to Him a new life, a new heart, a source of new energy, and new motives that unfold from within. He brings hope and goodness and truth. Pity can bring food and fire and clothes, and let pity make haste to do what it can. But this is the glory of the Gospel of God: this is the praise and this the distinction of the Lord Jesus Christ, — *He is come that we may have life, new life, life more abundantly.*

But not by cruel circumstances only is it that the reed comes to be bruised. It comes oftentimes by neglect, a weakness that is wickedness,—the Word hastily read, the prayer formally gone through; there is no living contact with Him Who is the source of our life, no heart communion with Jesus Christ. Who does not know the story? The reed that was vigorous and verdant grows withered and yellow. Little by little the stem that pointed steadily heavenward droops and bends over the earth; lower and lower it sinks until now it sinks helplessly, the bruised reed. Here again He comes on His way. No scorn is there in Him, no neglect or indifference, no harsh judgment; *that* bruised reed will He not break. Here again He gives the new energy,

the new life, the life more abundantly. As many as received Him to them gave He power, *authority*, to become the children of God.

The smoking flax does but repeat the truth in another form. The light is blown out by adverse circumstances or suffered to go out by neglect. The smoking flax—what a mercy it is that the spark does linger so long, that the wick does smoulder. You can blow out the flame, but you cannot blow out the fire. You may lose the light, but you cannot lose the desire. Ah, the fierce winds that blow about one in this great city, how often have they blown out the light! At home in the country screened and fed it flourished, but here at first perhaps concealed, then neglected, a puff of ridicule was enough to put it out. But see, no scorn is there in Him, no neglect, no indifference, but the tenderness of an infinite pity. He is the light of the world as well as the life. His grace unfailing can be the oil of the lamp, the store of its energy, as well as its kindling fire.

But no words of mine can tell what He is like so sweetly as the text proclaims it. "A bruised reed shall He not break, a smoking flax shall He not quench." Let everybody take it just as he needs it. It means that He cares for every bit of life, every breath, every spark of life. The gardener has to do with the poor little plants and seeds, and keeps them in the potting-house or the hot-house until they are at their stateliest and best, and

then they are taken up to the hall and decorate the table. Ah, is not this the gardener? He does not wait until we are at our fairest and best. He stoops to help us at our dearest and dullest, our poorest and worst, when life is almost gone out and the fire is at its last spark. He can help us and keep us in the most trying circumstances, however bleak winds blow, whatever biting frosts come. A most gracious, gentle, pitiful Saviour is He, and as mighty as He is gentle. Press up to Him; go on your way communing with Him. Cleave to Him, your life; rest in Him, your loving Lord; exult in Him, your Almighty Saviour.

THE VISION OF GOODNESS

“There be many who say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift
Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.”—*Ps.* iv. 6.

II

THE VISION OF GOODNESS

THIS Psalm must ever be taken with that which precedes it. The third and the fourth are the counterpart of each other. They are written in the same circumstances. The inscription at the head of the third Psalm belongs equally to the fourth. It is a Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his son, taking with him his wives and their children.

David had hurried forth from the palace with a brave band of six hundred men, bare-headed and bent in his great grief, whilst the people wept aloud beside him, exceeding sorrowful, just as a greater than David went long after across the brook Kedron and up the Mount of Olives. At such a time is it that these words are uttered, and amid such sorrows. About them lies the desert. They have but a little band of soldiers to protect them. The sun sinks behind the hills; the gloom gathers about them;

and they stand under these Syrian stars dreading lest in the darkness Absalom with his army should burst upon them.

Fugitives in the lonely wilderness, they who yesterday had all the luxuries of the palace, to-night are without a bed to lie upon, or a tent to shelter them, or food to eat. Then rings the cheery confidence of David in these brave words, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. . . . I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety."

See then that which gives this book its abiding force and authority. It is the Book of Life; of everyday life; of real, hard, stern life. No heroes are these, of unearthly saintliness, screened from the bitterness of its blasts. It is the book of men and women often wearied and worn out, and therefore is it the book for men and women of to-day.

What a homely stave is this with which the Psalm ends, full of a brave common-sense, as well as a blessed restfulness. "I will both lay me down and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." If at such a time and beset with such perils, David could sing so cheery a note, surely every one of us may make it his own.

Taking the scene and circumstances of the text we may see how naturally the question would arise,

and from how many sides it would press itself upon the soul.

I. *They felt, as never before, the loneliness and littleness of life.* They had come forth from David's stronghold in Mount Zion. There the soldiers guarded them and they were hedged about with a great feeling of safety. Day after day, and night after night, no danger came near their dwelling. Suddenly they are thrust forth into all these rude and rough discomforts of the wilderness; all that they had been accustomed to lean upon was gone. David the hero king,—David the unvanquished was flying a fugitive from his own son, and the nation was in revolt against him who seemed so strongly seated on the throne of Israel.

They had seen the king go bare-headed, as if the crown were no longer his. They had seen him go forth from his own city,—the sound of that weeping was within their ears. They had heard Shimei hurl his curse at the Lord's anointed, and seen him in fierce hatred fling stones and dirt upon the unhappy monarch. And now they are in the wilderness, weird and mysterious,—the great stretch of heaven overhead, the stillness broken by no sound except the howl of the wild beast. At such a time, in such a place, well might they ask, "Who shall shew us any good?"

Life's loneliness—there are times when we all have

to go into it,—there are chambers in the soul where no foot can fall, no dearest friend can come. There are circumstances that reveal to us this loneliness and intensify our sense of it. Who will shew us any good at such times? There is nobody, there is nothing that promises any hope. Life becomes a thing empty and forsaken, with no hand that can lead us, no voice that can speak to us. No light breaks through the haunting gloom. There is but one answer to that cry of the heart, “Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.”

Alas, when we come to talk about these things in sermons and on Sundays, they are listened to only as opinions, creeds, things that some people believe to be true and some do not. But is it an opinion only, a theory, or is it a thing that is true all the world over when we say that the mother is made for the babe,—that God never gives babies to any but mothers because the little baby and the mother are one? Its weakness must find its safety in the mother’s arms. The littleness is lost in the mother’s care. The wants are met by the mother’s ministry. And when we come to conditions which render us again as little children, lonely, helpless, wondering, is there then no love that waits for us, no pity anywhere, no help? Does God’s great love know how to make a mother and end there? Why, I am the least and lowest of all things,—the poorest and most miserable, not the top and crown of all creation, if

I am great enough to know the emptiness of earth, to feel the littleness of life, and yet can find nothing that responds and corresponds to me. All nature mocks me if that be so. What is it that light fits my eye, and the air my lungs, and the food my body, if the great deep hungry needs within my soul can never be satisfied? I am but the sport of all creation if all things else can find that which perfectly ministers to them, and I am all forsaken in the loftiest and deepest places of the soul. Love, that glory and redemption of our humanity, is but a cruelty and wrong if it bend over the unconscious babe with such sacredness of service, yet when we stand conscious through and through us of life's loneliness and littleness, there is no hand stretched forth to help us, no arm of love to guard us, no great heart to which we can come and rest and rejoice. The Son of God comes into the world to light up our lives with the blessedness of this message, "Your heavenly Father careth for you. Look at the lilies as they grow; think of the birds; remember your own care for your own child. *How much more shall your heavenly Father care for you.*"

For life's littleness and loneliness there is but one remedy. Once again let the blessed words fall like music of heaven upon our souls, "And there arose a famine in that land, and the citizen sent him into the fields to feed swine, and he said, I perish with hunger." Littleness and loneliness,—there it is

truly. "And he said, I will arise and go to my father. And when he was yet a great way off his father saw him and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him."

II. *See how the mystery of it all prompted the question, "Who will shew us any good?"* The rebellion burst upon the nation so suddenly that it was a bolt from the blue,—wrought so swiftly that it must have seemed as if everybody had been playing traitor to the king. David knew not either how to explain it or what to think of it. At such a moment all that one counted most stable and settled is broken and crashed like a potter's vessel. Everything merged into a hopeless confusion, and what more might come none could tell; cities, tribes, nations, might all be involved in the strife. To whom could David look? The ground trembled beneath his feet; all things were ready to be hurled into an avalanche of ruin. Absalom, his own son, was in revolt. Ahithophel, the chosen counsellor of David, had joined the rebels. The palace was gone, the throne, the crown were gone,—to whom could he look? "Who will shew us any good?" Then comes the answer. *Lord*,—how blessed was it to turn from all the wreck and ruin to that which abideth, the unchanging Lord. Absalom was gone, and many another. He knew not upon whom to count, but there was One to Whom David could appeal with restful confidence, "*Lord, lift Thou*

up the light of Thy countenance upon us." It is as when some wrecked sailor, his ship flung hither and thither by wild seas, swept from stem to stern, is borne upon a great wave and grasps a projecting rock and drags himself once more upon the firm earth, and there he stands and looks down upon the thundering waves and raging seas. It is as when some fugitive creeps through the gloom where his enemies watch to slay him, and at last he reaches the door of his home and finds himself safe amidst its sure love and glad hospitalities.

To every earnest man and woman there come such seasons or such conditions when one is overwhelmed with mystery and nothing seems sure, nothing safe. The heart cries in its anxiety, "Who will shew us any good?" And here again let us honestly ask ourselves, Is our greatness going to be our undoing? Because I am capable of wonder, able to see the mystery of things, to look before and after, am I of all things in the round world to be alone deserted and forsaken? Shall every creature find all that its capacity requires,—the beast that roams on land, the bird that flies in the air, the fish that swims in the sea,—is each to be perfectly adapted to its elements, shall all find that which answers to their need? And yet are we capable of thinking of God, of death, of judgment, of eternity, only to be deserted and maddened and oppressed by the mystery of it all? Are my thoughts to go outstretching the round world

and all that therein is, and can I find no home for my soul in which love opens a door to greet me? Alas, for the man who cannot stand and face life's mysteries with this great triumph, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, though the mountains thereof be carried into the midst of the sea.*"

III. *Again,—Here in the wilderness, beset by so many perils, every mind would look forward, stricken with the sense of their helplessness.* Every hour their condition grew more grave. Whence could come the food for themselves and their children? Had they been brought up to perish in this wilderness? Better that the enemy should come upon them than that they should wander here hungry and thirsty, with no city to dwell in. So again comes the cry, "Who will shew us any good?"

But even here faith finds a cheery word. "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." To have the smile and favour of God is to have all the universe at our service. He who fed Israel with the manna from heaven, and fetched the water from the rock, can do as much for His children as ever He did, and cares for us as much as He cared for them. On the morrow the little frightened company wondering, saw over the hill and along the desert the approach of another company. All gathered

alarmed. There came three chieftains with their followers who might have taken advantage of David's weakness. Two of them had been aforetime his enemies. But now they come bringing laden wagons filled with all sorts of good things. Here is Barzillai the Gileadite, and Machir, and Shobi, and "they brought pots and basons and earthen vessels and wheat and barley and flour and parched corn and beans and lentils and honey and butter and sheep and cheese and kine for David and for the people who were with him, for they said, The people is hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness." Let us every one be sure of this. Every door on earth may be closed, but never heaven's door. If we can look nowhere else we can always look up.

IV. *The words suggest yet another aspect of the question.* This flight, this peril, this bitter misery of rebellion, with its awful possibilities of civil war between father and son, all was the result of David's own sin, and he himself, thus reminded of his madness, plunged into a deeper penitence, might well ask, "Who will shew us any good?" If the man who had done such wonders in God's name, and had endured so much, and had dared so much, who had dealt so nobly with Saul and his house, a man who had been so wise and lofty in all his ways,—if *he* can sink down into such miserable folly and crime, if *he* can compass the vilest of murders in order to accom-

plish the basest of lusts, "Who will shew us any good?" Is there any such thing as goodness? Is it not after all only a word and a dream? So are there many that ask the question to-day, and ask it with a sickness of despair. There is an answer,—an answer for every one of us, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us."

We saw just now the laden wagons, and the chieftains bringing the store of provisions for David and his people. Does the sun shine in the heavens, does the rain fall, and are the seasons set to give us our daily bread, and yet are the great hungry longings of the soul for goodness to go for ever unsatisfied? Is there no power that can break the force of evil; no whisper of hope; no hand that can lift us up out of the mire and clay and set our feet upon the rock? *There must be.* Thank God there is! "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help." And lo, there cometh the very Son of God Himself to be the Saviour of the world. He hath broken the power of evil. He is the all-conquering goodness, stretching out to us His hand that we may find an Almighty help, and learn to cry exultantly, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*"

IS NOT THIS THE CARPENTER?

“Is not this the carpenter?”—*St. Mark* vi. 3.

III

IS NOT THIS THE CARPENTER?

THE Lord Jesus had gone up to the city of Nazareth. Once before He had visited it, immediately after His baptism and at the very beginning of His ministry, only to be angrily rejected with furious violence. This time His fame, which was being spread through the land, led them to receive Him with a greater show of welcome. They were eager to hear His words and to see His works. But a second time they turned from Him scornfully, "Whence hath this man these things?"

The words may have in them that dark and dreadful meaning which the Pharisees did not hesitate to express more plainly when they ascribed His miracles to the power of the devil. At any rate, the people of Nazareth were offended in Him and went muttering, "Whence hath this man these things? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Jude, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?"

How natural it was, and what a stamp of truth it gives to the whole record. That which offended the people of Nazareth has offended all the world in all the ages. How can any man be great when you know all about him? when you know his father and mother—knew him as a child? To many of those it seemed only yesterday that they saw Him a little lad at His mother's door. How could He be great Whom they had seen bending at His work with the sweat on His brow, making some simple thing for daily use?

“He marvelled because of their unbelief,” we read. This very thing for which they scorned Him, is His greatness, His glory. He came to bring God into everything; into the whole round of daily life; into childhood, and youth, and manhood; into all the conditions and relationships of every day. We must be as careful not to lose the human nature of the Lord Jesus in His divinity as we are not to lose His divine nature in His humanity.

Let us set that home-life of Nazareth clearly before us. Probably there is nothing in the three years of the Lord's ministry that is not more familiar to us than the conditions in which He lived for thirty years.

There is the widowed mother, with the family of six children besides Himself—four brothers and two sisters. There are James, and Joses, and Jude, and Simon, and the sisters, Esther and Tamar.

There is a curious trace of the family handed down to us by one of the Church fathers, who wrote one hundred and thirty years after the death of Jesus Christ. He tells us that the Roman emperor Domitian, as much troubled at the name of Jesus as Herod had been, enquired for any kinsfolk of the Lord still living. Two men were traced as the grandsons of Jude, the brother of Jesus, and were taken to Rome. The emperor asked them if they were of the lineage of David. They replied that they were. He then asked what property they owned ; and they told him that they had between them some £300, not in silver, but in the value of a piece of land containing some thirty-nine acres, from which they raised the taxes and supported themselves by their labour. They showed him their hands, which were hard and rough with daily toil. The emperor then asked them some questions about Christ, and after hearing their answers dismissed them as simple men about whom it was useless to trouble any further.

All that is told us in the experience of that early life is of beautiful simplicity. Jesus was no prodigy, startling people by wonders of development. The story is of a simple childhood, with homely feelings ; a quiet life, subject to His parents, and working for His daily bread. The life at Nazareth was, we are sure, full of exquisite beauty in word and deed—of stainless goodness and confidence in God, and sweet unselfishness and gentle wisdom, and, if need be, of

stern reproof of wrong and cruelty. Yet it is plain that He is perfectly one with all about Him. He lives in a little white flat-roofed house in a narrow street of Nazareth, on the top of which the doves sun themselves. The door is open, for the only light enters there, and we see the one room in which the family lives. There are a few mats on the floor; a ledge is built into the wall, covered with cushions and bright clothes—at night the bed of the inmates, by day a shelf for dishes. A painted chest stands in one corner of the room, containing the little family treasures. Near the door are two or three large water jars, with green leaves on top of them to keep the water fresh and cool. At mealtimes the painted stool is brought into the centre to hold the tray and dishes, round which the family sits cross-legged. Beside the house would be the carpenter's shop, with bench and tools, and outside it the timber, and the things that had been brought for repair. A carpenter in Nazareth would find much to do, for while the place was shut in by the hills, yet beside it ran the main thoroughfare from north to south, and along its narrow streets came Roman soldiers and Greek merchants and Arabs with their camels, and the stir of busy life filled the place.

Here then it was, far away from the narrow exclusiveness of Judea, that the Lord Jesus grew up as boy and man, storing His mind with the images which He wrought into His parables. On the slope

of the hills the grass was gay with a myriad flowers that His Father clothed in all their beauty. Here sang the happy birds that His Father fed with never-failing bounty. He stood and watched the hen as with frightened care she gathered the chickens under her wing to protect them from the hovering hawk. In the hills the foxes had their holes. Best of all we can think He loved to watch the shepherd as he went leading the sheep, carrying the little lamb in his bosom.

He was one with all the world in which He lived, —a child with the children, a youth with the youths. Every incident of the village life had for Him a deep interest,—the scenes of its weddings and its funerals, the work of the people, the sower and the merchant, the blind beggar and the leper and the sick folk. He went in and out amongst them, ever observant, reading with those clear eyes of His the very hearts of men, perceiving beneath their words and deeds the hidden life, and everywhere seeing the goodness that lay in men. To Him no human interest appealed in vain. His ready sympathy and quick spirit entered deeply into the problems that stirred the age. No recluse, no lonely and isolated youth was He, dreaming and misunderstood. The fact that He was so perfectly one with them all made His offence and gave to their complaint its force, “He is but one of us,” they said, “whence hath this man these things?”

Look at this as the distinctive glory of Jesus. Of

all the great leaders and reformers of the Bible He alone went directly forth from the midst of the people whom He had come to deliver. Moses had sought to do so, but the people angrily resented his coming and turned upon him, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" And he had to go into the wilderness, hidden for forty years; then he comes with all the mystery and awe of the unknown and is hailed as their deliverer.

Elijah startled the nation as a mystery,—a strange presence distinct in look and address; in tone and manner he was one alone and apart. The people came to think of him as possessed of some power that made him invisible, or indeed that he was taken up to heaven as soon as his message was spoken,—a lightning flash, sent for a moment out of the gloom, threatening and terrible, a crash of thunder at his heels,—and he was gone. So Obadiah speaks to him: "It shall come to pass that as soon as my back is turned the Lord shall carry thee I know not whither."

John the Baptist was in the wilderness until the day of his showing to Israel. Then he startled men as a *voice*, a thing without flesh and blood, that scarcely wore our humanity and that belonged to some purely spiritual realm. With the long hair of the Nazarite blowing about him, and the rough dress of camel skin secured with the leathern girdle, he stood another Elijah, his very food a thing peculiar,

holding himself aloof from the homes and haunts of the people, a voice in the wilderness.

But as Jesus comes they know all about Him. "Is not this the carpenter?" The little children know Him, and had often gone to play about His shop and never got an unkind word. Many a poor old body who had come to pick up the chips and shavings, said, "Oh yes, we know Him right well, the carpenter." Everything about Him made Him one with the people. His very disciples were simple fishermen who by their presence encouraged the people to draw near. He wore the dress of the people, not that of the Rabbis. His look and tone and manner were all simple and homely. He did not stand praying at the street corners, nor sound any trumpet before Him when He did His wonders. He sat down to eat and drink with all sorts of people, publicans and sinners. He went to a wedding and gladdened the party with a supply of wine. He talked so that everybody understood Him, and brought into His sermons all those everyday things that the people had to do with. Our ultra-refinement and fastidious ways would be almost as much shocked as were the haughty and exclusive Pharisees of those times if He came again to-day.

But what was the result? Everybody felt at home with Him, felt as if He belonged to them. Do you see how the people were always drawing *near* to Him—those who dared not draw near to any other good

person could come close to Him. We can scarcely think of an outcast woman falling down at the feet of Moses to screen herself from her accusers. We can scarcely think of the leper casting himself at the feet of the stern Elijah. We can scarcely think of the little children tripping up to John the Baptist. But to Jesus everybody came, leper and blind beggar and little children.

If there is one thing more than another that the blessed Lord longs to do for us, it is that He should be at home with us every one, our Friend and Brother as well as our Redeemer and Saviour coming right into the life and filling it with His presence. If there is one thing more than another that grieves His great love, it is that we make Him but One of Whom we sing in our hymns and preach in our sermons, of Whom we think in His high glory as the Lord of heaven, whilst the daily life is left just as lonely and the week just as empty as if He had never come at all. His great love longs to come right home with us, to come right home to us,—to fit into our wants and to fill the round of life with the light and peace and strength and music of His love.

Think, again, of that life in Nazareth for thirty years. Thirty years! And as the great Preacher and Teacher only three. Only three years for that mighty ministry. And why? Well, of the many answers that suggest themselves, this perhaps is the chief. Most men are not teachers or preachers. Life

is mostly a simple, lowly, hidden thing, lived in the little home, having to do with the same people, having to do with the same things,—a round of want and work, of eating and drinking and sleeping and waking, dreary and commonplace, to and fro in the little circle of the day. That is life always with most of us, and that is life mostly with all of us.

Think of it again,—the kitchen, the family, the workshop, the counter, the desk, day after day the same. There is a perpetual danger lest we should come to think that such a sphere is too little and too narrow for the high life of God. For the King of kings and Lord of lords there seems to be needed something sublime and splendid. We are always wanting wings to fly with in God's service, and we have only hands and feet. The Lord Jesus Christ comes into the world to teach us by those thirty years of life as the Carpenter, that the loftiest service of God can be lived out in the lowliest conditions,—that to do one's work honestly and thoroughly and cheerfully is as much the service of God as the life of the angels before His throne.

We have often been told that these thirty years were the long and patient training for His life-work. *Is it not rather that these thirty years were the patient doing of that work?* Was it not as a lad of twelve that He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" And from that hour assuredly He ever did His Father's business.

We see Him in that little home ; rising early He hastens to help His widowed mother with such household service as He can render. He hurries to bear the pitcher to the well. All day He seeks to bring into the home some bit of sunny brightness, some cheery confidence, some holy peace. And in His work He is able to make things such as every carpenter makes,—things that minister to the pleasure and service of men. Thus is He doing the business of His Father in heaven day after day and year after year through all those thirty years.

For us the great lesson is this—that the only religion a man has, is what he has *always*, not sometimes,—what he is in *everything*, not just now and then.

The measure of our religion is not in feeling, but in doing ; not in services on Sunday, but in service all through the week. How utterly and miserably mistaken are they who think that religion begins with a convulsion, and lives in an agony of effort or the ecstasy of rapture. Here is the highest and holiest life that ever was lived, or that ever can be,—the little round of daily life, filled up with honest work and simple love to God and men.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon ; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”—*St. Matt.* xii. 42.

IV

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

I

THE visit of the Queen of Sheba marks the climax of the greatness of Solomon. It is a remarkable proof of the new spirit that had come upon the nation. Hitherto the people of Israel had been wholly agricultural: the great peculiarity of their country was its isolation, situated in the very midst of the nations of the earth, yet it was curiously shut in and shut out. A sea-board without a harbour; without a single navigable river; with a vast desert on the south, a lofty mountain range on the north, and that strange descent of the Jordan valley in the east going down more than a thousand feet below the level of the sea. But Solomon changed all that. His enterprise did not exhaust itself in building the Temple and palace of Jerusalem. He actually crosses the great desert to the south, and at the head of the gulf that runs up to the east of the Arabian peninsula he makes a harbour and

himself superintends the building of a fleet of ships, and sends them to traffic in the east, as the ships of Tarshish sailed away to the west. Thence he reached to the Indies and brought home the sandalwood and the apes and peacocks and many of the treasures with which he enriched the palace and garden.

Thus his merchants and sailors, like those of our own Queen Elizabeth, went away to strange lands, carrying with them wherever they went the tidings of their great king, of the Temple that he had built to Jehovah the God of Israel; of the palace splendours; of his throne of state in the cedar Judgment Hall, a throne of ivory with golden lions on each step, the seat of which was a golden bull and the footstool was of gold. Now of the countries that they visited one was famous for its gold and frankincense and precious stones. It was the land of Sheba to the south. Thither came the captains and crews of Solomon's ships, and the queen heard of the strangers who had come to trade with them in their vessels from afar, men of a strange language. She sent for them to the court to hear from their own lips the wonderful things they had to tell of their great king and of their God and of Jerusalem.

The mere pageantry of the visit to Jerusalem has hidden from us the true queenliness and spirit of this woman. It was no idle curiosity that prompted

a journey involving so much risk and difficulty. Her very throne itself was imperilled by her departure and long absence. It is a proof of how firmly she was set in the affections of her people that she could venture to leave the land; a proof of her courage that she should dare to set out on such a journey. We can think that hearing of the wisdom of Solomon, hearing of the great things that he has done for his people, hearing above all that he has brought such prosperity to the land that every man could sit safely under his own vine and fig-tree, she forms her purpose. If she could learn to do so much for her own people it were worth anything. When the merchants have gone we can see her turn to her statesmen, every inch a queen, and full already of her lofty purpose,—“If I could but secure such well-being for this nation of mine I should count it cheaply earned if I went to the ends of the earth to get it.”

Again the merchants are sent for and all inquiry is made as to the direction of this goodly land and how it can be reached. The answer could not but be discouraging. Distances were immense in those days. In these days there are no distances. It was a journey for camels, by no means a comfortable method of proceeding; the soldiers must guard her, for there were many robbers; the servants must go to wait upon her, for her state must be in keeping with the greatness of the foreign court. She must

take with her a load of the most splendid and costly gifts. Then there was the great and terrible wilderness to be crossed, in which many had perished.

I am sure many an old counsellor shook his head over the proposal. "These strangers," said one, "are given to boasting, and boasting lives next door to lying, indeed very often in the same house." Another said, these new-fangled notions of prosperity would not suit their people, they were used to being miserable and never would be happy without it. (That old counsellor is living still, I know.) Another muttered to himself that Her Majesty was so enthusiastic—and that was so foolish. If Solomon wanted the Queen to come, let her wait till he asked her. It would be time enough to think about it then. And he proceeded to tell of a thousand ills that would very likely befall her if she would go. (That counsellor is living too, I fancy.) My lord chamberlain spent all his time trying to find a precedent, and was so long in finding it that Her Majesty was gone. And if she was the woman I think she was, she left a message for him, "Tell my lord that for a queen the truest etiquette is the welfare of her people."

Now I want us to think honestly and earnestly what have *we* heard? What are these tidings that have come into our midst? That there is a life in which the love of God is no vague thought, no

mere theory, but a felt and living reality, as real and close and constant and true as a mother's love to her little one; a love that delivers life from its loneliness, that looses its burdens of care, that hushes its fear, that brings into the soul a blessed peace and sunny hope. That this great love waits to welcome us with an abundant and glad forgiveness of the past, blotting it out and remembering it against us no more for ever. Have we not heard that there is One Who has broken the power of death—*abolished it*—and Who hath opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers? Best of all and most blessed, have we not heard that there is One Who is able to break within us the power of evil, to fulfil in us all the loftiest longings of the heart, Who is able to lift us up out of our weakness and to make us strong for all that is truest and purest and best; to make us more than conquerors, to create within us a new heart, to put into us a new will and a power that can achieve all goodness and all righteousness? Now if that be so what then?

If it were only whispered, hinted at by any broken words, were it not worth the seeking? Columbus found on the coast of Spain some strange bits of drift-wood and foreign weeds which he knew must come from an unknown world, and with no better evidence he launched out on the great deep and went on under strange stars and over trackless seas until he

found that new world. To-day Nansen with no better evidence believed in a current that ran in the Arctic Sea, and on the strength of his belief thrust his little craft right into the ice and let her drift. Have we not about us a thousand evidences to prompt our search? Have there not been a thousand lives and deaths that make us feel there is something greater and more blessed than aught that is human, to be found somewhere if we will seek it? The life that has come nearest to our ideal, has it not found its inspiration in Jesus Christ? The noblest charities and the most resolute endeavour to bless and uplift men, have they not been prompted by His life and His example? That very Cross which is the symbol of our religion, does it not mean a life of self-surrender for the good of others, a giving of ourselves to death for their sakes? And is it not something, is it not everything, that to-day the loftiest, truest, noblest life that any man can live is that which is likeliest to that life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? To think as He thought, to say as He said, to do as He did, is to find the life that is ever and ever the best for ourselves and for the world about us. Why is He never left behind? Why is He and He alone ever in advance of the ages? Why is it that to-day, nearly nineteen centuries after He lived and died, never was His name so honoured, never were His words so treasured, never was His influence so widespread in its beneficence?

So then do we not every one of us stand to-day beset on every side with that which might well prompt us to enquire into this matter? How little, how scanty and uncertain were the tidings which came to the queen of old, compared to that which we have had concerning the greater than Solomon, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us give heed to the solemn words of the Lord Jesus, lest this queen from afar rise up in judgment against us to condemn us.

This Queen of the South was not content with hearing about Solomon. She did not listen to the tale that these merchants told, and then talk for a minute or two about it, and straightway forget it all, as if it were of no further concern. She made up her mind there and then that if such an one lived she would go to him and ask such questions as he and only he could answer, that would give her peace and be a blessing to her people.

She was not content with asking the counsellors what they thought of it, even the oldest or the wisest of them. She did not send an ambassador to the King; matters like these were personal and sacred, and she must go herself, and go she did.

Oh, the misery of it is that such hosts amongst us are content with hearing *about* these blessings of God. Alas, there are thousands of people who think all this is only to be preached about, never to be sought after: only to be heard about, never really found.

There are thousands of people who would not think of missing the service, and yet never once in their lives have they said in downright earnest, "If this Jesus Christ of Whom I hear be the living and loving Saviour I will find Him for my very own." Better never to have heard a sermon at all than to get into the habit of thinking that hearing about Him is all. How many others are content with hearing what others say of Him. If others raise difficulties and objections they are ready at once to accept them. My brother, this is a personal matter between God and the soul. Those whose opinions I listen to will not be able to help me when the great issues of my life have to be met. In death and judgment and eternity no hand can help but His; no other aid can avail.

She had a long way to go and it was doubtful if she would ever reach him. She came, we read, from the uttermost parts of the earth. It was a long way, a strange road, beset with inconveniences and difficulties, and even dangers. But she was not daunted, she was not to be turned aside. She had made up her mind and she went.

Ah, we can have no doubt. To us success is pledged. "Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." For us it is never a long way to go. He is ever nigh at hand and not afar off. Let those of us who shrink at the first rebuff, who yield at the first whisper

of danger, find in this woman's example a new courage. It should shame us into resoluteness.

She had no invitation. She did not know how he might receive her. These great kings were jealous of strangers. Upon some pretence that she came to spy out the land he might have her seized as a prisoner, and held her and her servants to be ransomed at some enormous cost. Such things were common enough. And if he received her was it not likely that he would look with contempt upon her? Even civilized people like the Greeks were accustomed to regard those as barbarians whose language and ways were foreign to themselves. But this brave woman will risk it all, and with a splendid courage, the courage of a woman, the courage of a queen, she comes.

No invitation! Ah, did ever love utter such gracious words, did ever tenderness breathe a more yearning entreaty than that which He speaks to every one of us? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." He Himself hath come to lead us safely on our way. *Behold, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in, and sup with him, and he with Me.* We know what welcome awaits us. Never was there such graciousness, never such helpfulness, never such love as His. Never doth He upbraid us

for our folly ; never scorn us in our sin. No harshness overtakes our poor strength for goodness ; no splendid ideal thrusts us back in despair. His gentleness doth make us great. His lament and grief are that we do not come.

She came seeking wisdom, and seeking it after all from one who could show her much more than he could give her. Wise men cannot impart their wisdom ; rather is it easier for them to show us our own folly. But of Him to whom we may come it is written, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth liberally and upbraideth not." And not wisdom only is it that He waits to bestow. He is *our life*. If He be indeed the Saviour of the world, if there be no other name given under heaven whereby men can be saved, then does everything depend upon our coming to Him and our acceptance of Him. Here is our peace, our hope, our all.

She came bringing rare and costly presents. We come with but the confession of our sins, sins that have wrought the shame and anguish of our Lord. The miserable story of our forgetfulness and faithlessness, our shameful half-heartedness, alas, it may be, our denial of our Lord, our cruel forsaking of Him. No gifts have we, no gold or frankincense with which to buy His favour, no grace or title with which to claim His love. Ah, but the gifts are His—He bids us come, wretched and miserable and poor

and blind and naked, that He may give to us the pure gold and the white raiment and the gift of sight. And all this is ours for the simple and earnest seeking.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

“ The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon ; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”—*St. Matt.* xii. 42.

V

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

II

SO the Queen of Sheba has come to see King Solomon. Let us first think of the glory that she beheld, and then of his wisdom that she heard.

The scene of her coming is one of the utmost splendour. It is a tribute indeed to the far-reaching fame of Israel, which king and people alike may well seek to turn to the fullest account. At the city gate Solomon comes forth to meet the queen in all his glory, with flashing crown of pure gold, and royal robes of costliest magnificence, every inch a king. About him are the great officers of state in their gorgeous apparel, the old wise counsellors, the chief captains of his army. Everywhere is the vast crowd of citizens, thronging every house-roof and city-wall, and clustering on every point of vantage. The music of his singing men and singing women fills the air with glad welcome. And now seated at his side in the chariot of cedar with its tapestried curtains, and

drawn by the horses of Egypt all richly caparisoned, they go on their way. Solomon points out to her the Temple that he has built—that wonder of the world—and the Judgment Hall, and many another stately edifice. And now they reach the palace with its luxurious gardens filled with treasures from all lands. And seated at the great banquet which the king has prepared in her honour, she sees his wealth, the vastness of his possessions, the hosts of his servants, the cupbearers at his side, the banqueting hall, itself a marvel of splendour. We read, "There was no more spirit in her"; overwhelmed by the sight of such boundless wealth and the vision of such glory, she cried, "*Behold, the half was not told me.*"

Look at it all, and ask yourself, *What of it?* As we watch it fades: King Solomon and Queen of Sheba and palace of splendour and hosts of attendants are gone, faded into dust and nothingness. And what is left from the sight of it? There comes to no one of us any inspiration. There is no uplifting, no new strength for goodness, no blessed prompting to be true, to accept life with a braver heart and to do our duty with a cheerier spirit. How dead it all is! It brings with it no touch of added nobleness. Yes, it fades.

Before us rises another scene. Jesus sits in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is a long way from that splendour; a poor entertainment is this indeed. The Lord Jesus cared little for show or etiquette, but

He set a great store by love. And here there is none. It is as if the host had said within himself haughtily, "Is not this the carpenter?" and counted that anything was good enough for the lowly Prophet of Nazareth. We hear the gentle upbraiding, "Thou gavest Me no water for My feet; thou gavest Me no kiss; My head thou didst not anoint with oil." The commonest courtesies of hospitality were withheld.

And now at the door amidst the crowd that stood and looked and listened—for privacy seems a thing impossible in the East—there came a woman that was a sinner, well known, too well indeed. Men gathered their robes as they passed her, lest by a lightest touch she should defile them. Go forth from the Queen of Sheba and seek the one who is furthest away from all opportunity of entering the palace of the king, and all hope of any kindly recognition, and you may find her there.

But lo, as she sees the scanty preparation, the cold reception, her woman's heart is made indignant. "Would that I were worthy to ask Him beneath my roof; or would that I could bid Him come and sit at meat with me. All that I have were His to minister in any way to His comfort. But I, alas, am so far down and He so holy—there is no chance for me." So she thinks.

Then lo, that Face is lifted, the eyes meet hers. He, all-pitiful, reading her heart, looks an invitation that

she cannot resist. And there in the presence of the Pharisees, as they start with horror, every man shrinking from this infamous intruder, every face filled with scorn, she hurries across to the side of the Lord Jesus and falls at His feet. She pours forth her penitence in a flood of tears ; then, startled that she should thus have bathed His feet, she loosens her hair and wipes them with reverent hands, and tenderly kissing His feet, she draws from the folds of her dress a pot of unguent, and pours its fragrance upon them. And Jesus put His arm forth and laid His hand tenderly upon that bowed head, as if her Defender and Deliverer. And He said unto her, *Thy sins are forgiven thee.* And within that leprous soul it was as if there sprang up a new life all sweet and pure and fresh and beautiful like the life of a little child.

That is the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. He cares nothing for the splendour that dazzles men. He cares nothing for pomp and stately magnificence. King of kings, and Lord of lords, yet is He the blessed Friend and Brother of us all. *This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.* To draw to Himself the outcast and unloved, to bend with pity over the sad and sinful heart, to heal and cleanse and uplift, to bring hope to the soul that had gone down in despair, and to bring the dawn of heaven—that is the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look again upon that scene. It never fades. A

new pity, a new hope, a new power for goodness comes into us as we think of it. Listen to her as she goes forth wondering and adoring, saying within herself, "I had heard indeed that He was gracious and loving, but *behold the half was not told me.*"

Think of the wisdom with which Solomon met the Queen of Sheba. We can easily imagine the words which showed his skill in debate. There doubtless was the keen wit, the brilliant saying, the shining wisdom, the glow of poetry, the genius that flashed radiant as a diamond. We gladly yield these gifts our admiration. Do not let us seem for one moment to belittle them. They are of God: let us thank Him for them wherever they are. But—but—I come away from it all: it dies like the glory vanished; words however true, sentiments however sublime, wisdom however vast, what do they do for us? We have it on the shelves of our libraries, and we honour the names of the authors. But how far away it is! and how little after all! There was a practice of medicine once that professed to cure disease by consulting the stars. Whilst the poor patient fretted and moaned, the learned physician was studying the planets. Ah, it was no doubt very fine and very grand to have a physician who knew so much and looked so high. But that is not what we want. We want a doctor who bends over us, hushed and eager, who knows the heart's throb, who knows the very

nerve along which the pain pulses, and himself feels all our weariness and ache.

Truth is not the truth I want when it sparkles only in fine sayings. It must live in eyes that look upon me, in hands that minister to me, in a heart that pities and loves me. Solomon spoke the truth, but Jesus said *I am the truth*. By all means let us listen to the proverbs of Solomon. It is instructive to know that "the legs of the lame are not equal," and interesting to think how he would enforce and illustrate the truth. But it is better to have one who knows it with a great yearning pity, and who stretches forth a hand of almighty help, and speaks with a resistless authority, *rise up and walk*, and sends the lame man leaping and praising God.

We turn from all that Solomon spake, and listen to our blessed Lord as He saith, "Your heavenly Father careth for you." We see Him stand and we hear Him speak, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Oh, the music lingers with us and soothes and hushes us, and strengthens us, and as through the music of old there comes upon us another spirit.

We hear Him tell the story of the lost sheep, and the lost money, and the story of the prodigal son, and there lives a new hope, the dawning of a new day. We listen to that sublime utterance, "God so loved

the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Behold, behold, the half was not told me." No words can utter, no thoughts can reach to that of which we have to tell. The queen of the south may have sat in the Judgment Hall, startled at some display of wisdom like that which settled the dispute between the two mothers. But never did she dream of wisdom and love like that which we celebrate. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. He gave Himself for us, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Slowly let those amazing words sink into our hearts, *The Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me.* Eternity itself can never unfold the height and depth, the length and breadth of that love which passeth knowledge.

Let us see to it that the queen of the south do not put us to shame and rise up to condemn us.

She communed with Solomon, we are told, of all that was in her heart. Simply and earnestly she told of her longings for her people and of the difficulties that beset her. She communed with him of the mystery of life, how to reach the highest and best. She asked him of many a matter that had perplexed her. Graciously the king listened and wisely he assured her.

Ah, never was there any to whom we can tell

all the heart as we can to Him. Withhold from Him no want. In glad communion tell Him all that is in thine heart.

She gladly acknowledged the truth of all that she had heard. *It was a true report that I heard in my own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom.* Let us renew our faith and love to our Lord. It is a true report that we have heard. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

Behold, the half was not told me. Oh, dull is our vision and unworthy our thought of our glorious Lord, unless the soul do find in Him its fulness of joy. The past forgiven with a great full forgiveness that has for ever blotted it out; the future pledged to us with ten thousand exceeding great and precious promises; that almighty power ours for ever and ever available for our help. How can we rightly celebrate love like His?

She gave Solomon of her treasures. Let us bring to our Lord and Saviour all the love of the heart, all the strength of our service, all that we have and are.

She received of his bounty. Let us claim boldly that which the King of Heaven is so glad to bestow. His upbraiding is that we seek so little at His hands. *Ask and receive*, saith He, *that your joy may be full.*

She blessed all those that were about the king. Let our heart find in the presence of the Lord a new love to others, a delight in blessing. Let old jealousies die, they have lived a great deal too long, —slain by that great love wherewith we are loved. Think with a new kindliness of those against whom we may have been prejudiced and bitter. Breathe a word of forgiveness. Be determined to seek reconciliation to those whom we may have offended. The true communion with the King cannot be ours so long as any bolt of ill-will is shot across the door of the heart.

Then she departed into her own country. Away from the splendid presence to the dreary wilderness and along that perilous journey. But our joy is that we never need go away. We shall never wear out our welcome, never exhaust the great store of His provision. *I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

NOBODY,—SOMEBODY,—EVERYBODY

“She was not hid.”—*St. Luke* viii. 47.

VI

NOBODY,—SOMEBODY,—EVERYBODY

HERE is a story beautiful as it is blessed, if only by God's grace it is told as it should be told,—the story of how *nobody* became *somebody*, and how *somebody* became *everybody*.

First then, *Nobody*. The story opens with a picture of a woman not important enough to have a name. Poor and feeble, she comes before us thrust hither and thither in a crowd. And if you want to be nobody and to know it get into a crowd. Solitude is often the best company—for real and utter loneliness you must be lost in a crowd. But this woman's loneliness was not only in the crowd, it was everywhere. You see, she was a woman; and that of itself was rather a dreadful thing until Jesus came. We read of His disciples that they marvelled that Jesus should talk to a woman. One of their reverend Rabbis had declared that it was better to burn the words of the law than to teach

them to a woman. A woman was forbidden to worship God in the same court as her stately lord and master.

And this woman was enfeebled by twelve long years of sickness. Her very sickness shut her away from intercourse with others, whilst it dragged down all her energy and hope. She was poor, wretchedly poor. "She had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any." Every thought of herself only thrust her further away from help, and shut her up in her dreary loneliness.

The very sympathy of those about her had spent itself. They had grown so used to seeing her as she was, that they had ceased to think of her with any tenderness. What is so familiar cannot continue to impress. One who had been ill for twelve years must not expect to be pitied by her neighbours; they had got so used to seeing her ill. And if ever she felt that she was nobody, it was certainly to-day. The great prophet of Nazareth was in the village, passing her very door; yet she dared not ask Him to heal her. There was Jairus, a man of influence and importance,—oh, happy maiden, who had such a father to speak for her. And yet even Jairus had fallen at the feet of the great Prophet and besought Him to come and lay His hand upon the little maiden. What room then was there for a poor feeble body such as she is, in the presence of such an One as that?

And there were His disciples—Peter and John and James and Philip and Andrew—she dared not speak to one of them to get their influence, she whom the law pronounced unclean. Yet like a guilty creature she whispered, "If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole."

Now forth she ventures into the crowd, but her case is worse than ever. Borne hither and thither by the surging mob, fearing that she will be trampled underfoot of these fierce fellows that press on every side—poor thing, this is no place for her. As the crowd sweeps past let us stay a moment to think of it all.

How many there are in a like evil case who seem to have everything against them, who are shut off from all help, look where they will. Around them there are only hindrances; within them weakness, and worse than weakness. Their struggles have left them in despair. They look at one and another, and think how gladly they would change places with them, just as this poor woman looked on Jairus and the disciples. Some people seem to have all the advantages; and some seem to have no chance at all, nothing but failure and disappointment, do what they will.

But now let us turn to the second chapter of our story, *Somebody*. We see again this feeble woman wasted and wearied by being pushed and hustled

to and fro in the crowd, all unable to hold her own amongst the press. Then suddenly some happy chance brings her close to Jesus. Without a moment's delay, or the opportunity will be lost, she thrusts forth a trembling hand and touches the hem of His garment. Instantly she feels the healing virtue flowing like a tide of new life within her, and she is whole.

But see, Jesus stops, and the host of people stand still. What is it? A hush of wonder falls upon all as the Lord turns Himself about in the crowd looking for some one. Is He not in haste to get to the house of the ruler to heal the little maiden? Why then this delay? And now as all is hushed, He asks, "Who touched Me?"

It was a strange question to ask when on every side the great crowd had been surging about Him. All wondered. The frightened woman stood with downcast eyes, trembling from head to foot, hoping she would be overlooked. She is nothing and nobody; they will not suspect her. Then Peter remonstrates, "Master, the people throng Thee and press Thee, and sayest Thou 'Who touched Me?'" Jairus, too, must have ventured to look the entreaty that perhaps he shrank from putting into words, "Master, never mind who touched Thee; my little daughter is at the point of death."

But Jesus stands still looking about Him. "Somebody—*somebody* hath touched Me." So then this

poor nobody was somebody now ; *somebody*. We do not read the word rightly if we think of it as having any touch of reproof,—we do not read it rightly if we think of it as spoken in a tone of mere curious wonder. It was all tenderness. He who felt the touch read with infallible love all that it meant, “There is a poor trembling soul here afraid to ask for healing. Who is it? Somebody has touched Me.” “And when the woman saw that she was not hid she came trembling and falling down before Him, and she declared unto Him for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately.” Yes she is *somebody* now.

Everybody. We must hurry on, the story is too beautiful to break it here. She is somebody now. Look at her at His feet where Jairus had been, she, the poor wasted woman in the place of the ruler of the synagogue! As they stood, and watched, and listened, they saw Him, the Almighty Prophet, lay His hands upon her tenderly, and He said “Daughter,”—no more gracious words ever fell from His lips,—“Daughter, be of good comfort.” It fell like healing balm upon her timid soul. It quieted every whisper of her fear. Well might they marvel at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. “Be of good comfort ; thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace.” Now is it indeed as if she were everybody—thus to have His tender recog-

nition of her, to hear His benediction, to feel His virtue healing her, to have the blessing of His touch and the sweetness of such a name from His lips, and to go away as into an atmosphere that He has charmed and hallowed. How gladly would all that host change places with her now, and even Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, might well have blessed her, for by that miracle of healing his faith was strengthened to expect the little maiden from the dead. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has come to do for every one of us,—to make nobody into somebody, to take away all the littleness and loneliness and emptiness of life, and to fill it with His love.

I saw it all beautifully illustrated once. It is some years since that I happened to find wandering aimlessly along the street a lost child of some three years. It was just dazed and bewildered. I spoke to the little one, but it only looked at me with great sorrowful eyes, and shook its head. "What is your name?" said I, "and where do you live?" But never a word could I get in reply—only that look of unutterable grief. If there was ever a nobody in the world, here was one—a lost child unable to tell its name or its home!

I took the child to the house of a friend near by, and telephoned to the police station. Ah, it was somebody then, as one and another began to ring the bell, and half a dozen came in succession to ask questions about it, and all sorts of police arrange-

ments began to be put into use for it. And the excitement spread as they telephoned to another office, and yet another. "Come, little one," said I, "you are somebody now." At length there came a message that a woman had called at the office in great distress about a lost child. It was hers, and she was coming to fetch it. At last I heard a knock at the door, and myself opened it with the child. Then when the mother took the little one with a great sob, and pressed it to her heart with tearful eyes, and kissed it, and sat down overwhelmed with gladness, that little one was no longer somebody only—to her it was everybody.

That is the gospel of God. A love that finds us out one by one, and makes us feel that we are not hid. Live where we may, be what we will, that great love finds us. The love of God is not like the sun in the heavens, a blaze of splendour, infinite in its vastness, but far above us; it is like the sun whose warmth and blessing creep into each separate flower, fitting it perfectly, and unfolding its fragrance and glory.

Everything about the Lord Jesus, everything that He said, and everything that He did, and everything that is said of Him, reveals to us this separate and individual love. Nothing else can satisfy us. His love must come to each of us by ourselves fitting into the separate character, helping each in the separate needs, dealing with each in the separate circum-

stances; responding to *my* heart and giving *me* Himself.

It is the *one* lost sheep that the Good Shepherd goes tracking out into the wilderness seeking diligently until He find it, bending over it, laying it on His shoulder, and bringing it home with rejoicing. It is the *one* lost piece of money for which a candle is lighted, and the house is swept, and a diligent search is made, and it is joyfully recovered. It is the *one* son in the far country for whom the father yearns and watches, and whom he sees afar off, and when he sees him runs and falls upon his neck and kisses him.

All that religion really means is a separate *personal* work, or it is nothing at all. If there is to be any conviction of sin, it must be a work of God in the man's own soul. If there is to be any forgiveness, it must be spoken distinctly to my very heart, "Thy sins are forgiven *thee*."

All that the great love of God has provided is for *you*, as if there were none to share it. All that Christ ever did for any He waits to do for *you*. All that the love of God can bestow of peace and joy and hope His love holds forth for *you*. This one word sums it all up, "*He loved ME and gave Himself for me.*"

THE DOUBT OF THOMAS

“ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

“ The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.

“ And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them : then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

“ Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side : and be not faithless, but believing.

“ And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and My God.

“ Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”—*St. John* xx. 24-29.

VII

THE DOUBT OF THOMAS

THOMAS the doubter,—how shall we think of him? Cold-hearted, half scornful, refusing to accept anybody's declaration that Jesus Christ was risen? Is that the man,—stubbornly certain that nothing but the evidence of his own senses can make him believe it? Is this the meaning of his words, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails and put my fingers into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side I will not believe"? Surely it is a sign of how blind our reading of the Bible is that with us doubt is only intellectual—a thing to be spoken of harshly and dealt with severely.

We can classify the doubters. There is the *indifferent doubter* with whom all matters of religion are of so little importance that it is absurd to claim a miracle in support of them, especially such a miracle as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The matter is dismissed with a scornful laugh. There is the *con-*

ceited doubter, to whom it is a kind of superiority to question what others assert, and who thinks that to air one's difference from those around us is a sign of independence. Then there is the *doubter that only talks*—harping upon objections and difficulties that it has never felt but has heard others mention. And last of all *there is the honest doubter*, to whom all that is spiritual is unknowable. We have no faculties to perceive it. I cannot see it, nor hear it, nor can any skill of science reach it or weigh it in the balance, and therefore it is rejected.

But surely Thomas is not represented by either of these classes. He knows little of his own heart or of other people's who thinks when he is among these that he is touching the chief source of doubt, where all of us have something of Thomas in us and some of us a great deal.

I want us to study together this character, not as an interesting incident of scripture history, but as touching our own innermost life. Far from being a matter of reproof there is nothing in the whole story of the resurrection more pathetic than this doubt of Thomas.

I. *The very character of Thomas teaches us that faith is a much harder thing for some people than it is for others.* Thomas was a slow, diffident man, a week behind the rest in seeing everything. Three

times only Thomas speaks in the Gospels and each time it is with a sigh. There is a dolefulness in the tone, a shake of the head, you feel the despondency of the man. The first is when Jesus, under sentence of death, had gone into the region beyond Jordan for a while and now proposed to return to Jerusalem. The disciples seek to stay Him, saying, "Master, the Jews sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again?" But Thomas turned to the disciples and said, "Let us also go that we may die with Him." The next time is when Jesus talks at the Last Supper with His disciples and says, "Whither I go ye know and the way ye know." Thomas sadly replies, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The third time he speaks is in this incident of the resurrection. You will see the character of the man in each of these speeches. And there are no people in the world who need to be more tenderly dealt with than those slow and diffident ones, who have always been at a disadvantage. We are tender and pitiful to the defects of the body. We do not scold the blind lad because he cannot paint, and we cannot be hard with the lame boy because he is unable to run. But alas, natural defects of character have neither patience nor pity, and they need both. There are hosts of such people about us to whom sunny hope and restful faith are almost impossible. And the natural defect is made a hundred times worse by

the way in which those slow and diffident ones are dealt with at school and at home. They are never encouraged, but are always measuring themselves and being measured by the more captivating and brilliant ones about them. We laugh at the father who said that his children should never go near the water till they could swim, but we often deal just as foolishly with our children. We keep them from any confidence in themselves. We forbid the very expression of opinion. We check the development of their life in its individuality. Life, you know, must unfold like a flower, from *within*. We often try to mould it, as a potter moulds the clay, or the farmer's wife puts her stamp upon the butter. One said to me with a sigh, "I could have done anything at school if I had only been encouraged, but nobody ever gave me the least feeling that I could do anything." Now such people grow up diffident, afraid of themselves, slow to accept anything with confidence. They can do nothing else. Faith in anything is a hard matter to the man who has never been encouraged to have any faith in himself. To some, faith is as easy, as simple, as natural as breathing is to a healthy child, and to some it is a gasp and an effort which takes all the strength.

Open the ear of the heart, timid one, and let me, by God's grace, speak to you. Our most gracious Lord will never let any one of us be at a disadvan-

tage because of the peculiarity of our character. He who made us to differ understands each perfectly. In Him is the perfect manhood that corresponds to us everyone. He will ever do most for those who have most to hinder them. The loveliest words that earth has ever listened to, that heaven itself ever heard, are spoken to you. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." And very beautiful is Matthew Henry's comment upon these words. "Christ is meek and can have compassion on those who are dull and slow. He is lowly in heart and condescends to teach poor scholars and beginners." Would it not have been almost blessed to have been blind when Christ was upon the earth, if we could have had those hands laid upon us, and looked forth out of darkness into the light of that countenance, and is it not good to be slow and diffident if so we may know the gentle tenderness and sweet patience of our Lord and Saviour? He hath room for thee amongst His disciples, room for thee amongst the innermost and nearest and dearest of His disciples.

II. *See another aspect of this doubt as we turn from the character of the man to the story.* Thomas so slow, so diffident, so apt to despond, has found the Lord Jesus Christ, and with all the power of devotion, with the simple, single, whole-hearted devotion that

such people are capable of when once their confidence is won, he clings to the Saviour. "Let us also go that we may die with Him" was the utterance of one ready to suffer anything for His Lord's sake. And now that Lord has gone—gone. He had heard that voice speak its gracious words with such authority. He had seen with all adoring wonder the goodness and tenderness and beauty of the Saviour. He had looked upon the miracles which had been wrought and his soul clave to the Lord Jesus. And now Christ was dead.

Do you wonder that Thomas was absent at the gathering of the disciples on that first Sunday after Easter? I do not. It is just what I should expect. This man has said in his soul, "No, no, how can we meet since He is not there? How can we talk when He has been crucified? What is life for us since He is not? Hope has gone out; faith is dead. Would, would that I had died with Him." The crushed heart cannot gather itself together again. Mary, blinded by her tears, was blessed that she could weep. Thomas was choked by his grief. It is told of one of our poets that at the death of his child he cried fiercely, "Never will I risk such anguish again, I will never love anything any more." Such grief refuses to be comforted, feeling it an outrage to hint that it could ever be lightened or lessened. For such a loss, for such a death, the only thing is to go sorrowing down to the grave. The heart must not, dare not seek any healing

Thus it is that many have gone into the gloom and power of doubt. There has come an hour in their lives at which time stood still and beyond which they could not move. They have gone out into the darkness weeping bitterly, and they did not want, but rather dreaded, the cruel tone of comfort.

There yet remains that which more than all else probably caused the doubt of Thomas, as it caused the doubt of God's great heroes, Elijah and John the Baptist.

Turn for a moment to Elijah as he sits in the wilderness under the juniper tree, after the three years of famine for which he had prayed that Israel might know whence their mercies came, after the challenge of Baal and the slaughter of their priests, after Israel's acknowledgment of God and Ahab's submission to Him, was all to be undone because of this Jezebel? Was she to be triumphant? Were the glory and the truth of Jehovah and the destiny of Israel to be set aside by this heathen woman in her pride and her might? What then was the good of it all? Why had he lived and prayed and spoken, if she was to conquer? And Elijah, the man of God, pleaded and prayed that he might die.

Look at John the Baptist, the other hero, as he paces his dungeon like a caged lion. He has thundered at the adulterous king, "It is not lawful for thee to have that woman to thy wife." He may

lose his head for it, but what of that? With him the only question is, Where is the Christ? What is He doing? This mightier than John,—healing blind men indeed, cleansing lepers, sitting eating and drinking with publicans and sinners! And all the time this Herod is on the throne with this Herodias beside him. And in his fierceness of indignation he sends two of his disciples to demand, “Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?”

This it was that filled the soul of Thomas with doubt as it fills men’s hearts with doubt to-day. If heroes like Elijah and John the Baptist wondered at the triumph of ill, what marvel if that which Thomas had seen plunged him into an agony of bewilderment. Christ, the pure and blessed one, He who spake such words, who wrought such works, who lived such a life, He who had such power, is put to death by the spiteful jealousies of those rulers, and He who was all goodness and love, is bound and beaten, spit upon and scourged, led away to be crucified with thieves! Oh, could there really be a God in heaven, and was there any right, any truth, any goodness anywhere?

So comes the deepest gloom of all. We feel it to-day, and have felt it during the months of this year when the Christian nations of Europe sit amidst their armed hosts and beside their ships of war afraid to move although the Armenians are outraged and butchered by the thousand.

And to many and many an one it comes in this

great London. Screened from the knowledge of ill in all the sanctity of a Christian home they have been suddenly compelled to face the awful facts of life. Little wonder that men and women are maddened at the sight of ill all unchecked and uncondemned, with its money and its might, whilst the cry of its victims goes up day and night, little children and wronged women and suffering men. Then, at such a time, the hand is apt to let go its hold, the heart sinks, there seems to be no help anywhere in life, no light in heaven, no God on earth.

Let us turn to see the Lord Jesus dealing with this doubt. First, He calls him by his name "Thomas." So the Lord Jesus came to Mary, so to Simon. The Saviour was ever all tenderness, all perfect love, yet is it written that He was made perfect by suffering,—a word indeed mysterious, but still it could not be but by that agony and by His deep and dreadful sorrow, and by that appalling loneliness there should come even to Him a deepened sympathy. His words, so gracious always, were even more gracious as the risen Christ. So is it that He comes to each of us by ourselves, separately, calling us by our name and teaching us to say, "My Lord and my God." It is by a separate act of dealing with each of us and with a separate revelation of Himself that Jesus Christ makes Himself ours.

Then He meets Thomas away in the innermost

thought of His heart. "Thomas, reach hither thy finger, put forth thy hand." So must His word often meet us in the innermost heart. And so must we see Him ; and to commune with Him and gaze upon those wound-prints is our deliverance. These are His sacred love tokens, the great, unchanging assurance of a love that for our sake has conquered every ill. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins," and in Him is the assurance that let things be dark as they may love can conquer. Cunning and grief and cruelty are not the forces that triumph. After all, the risen Christ is the everlasting proof that only goodness lives. Truth, the crucified, is King, and He must reign for ever and ever.

CHRIST SANCTIFYING HIMSELF

“For their sakes I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”—*St. John* xvii. 19.

VIII

CHRIST SANCTIFYING HIMSELF

ANY man is to be pitied, surely, who tries to preach from a text like this.

Have you ever gone with a party led by a guide to some mountain height,—through a defile it may be, then out of the gloom to a summit where all the great beauty burst suddenly before you—the sunny mountains that slope down to the waters of the lake, the far-off peaks rising against the blue sky? But whilst you stand wrapped in awe, wanting to be still and to worship, of the others one is stooping to pick a flower that might be found anywhere; another is chipping off a stone to carry away as a memento, so busy about the stone that he loses the view. Two others stand with their backs turned upon it all discussing some stupid opinion that is not worth the breath they waste over it. And yet another pulls out his watch and wonders how long they will stay.

But in my case I am not only a guide. I have, if

I can, to reveal to you the great heights and depths of life's possibilities which lie within these words, to bring the uplifting of the soul that ought to be ours. Pity me and help me ; I would come with you, longing to get for myself, and that each may get for himself, something of the great meaning of these words into our own hearts and lives.

Let us think of Jesus Christ sanctifying Himself for our sakes. The word "sanctify" here does not mean what we understand by making holy,—Jesus Christ was ever holy. He alone, of all good men that ever lived, never confessed His sin and never asked forgiveness. Just as in the Old Testament sundry things were set apart for God's use and service, consecrated by being separated for God, thus Jesus Christ speaks of Himself here as sanctified. "For their sakes I set Myself apart, I devote and consecrate My life, I hold Myself as one bound, having no choice, surrendered and given away to God's will for their sakes."

There are three aspects in which we may look at this life of surrender to the will of God.

Think of Christ *accepting the condition of utter dependence upon the Father.* He, who was Himself one with God Almighty, for our sakes enters upon a life of absolute dependence upon the care of the heavenly Father. For our sakes He is born a poor babe in the bosom of an earthly mother. Day after day He toiled with sweat of brow in the carpenter's

shop that He might redeem and uplift our life, ennobling it, and that we might know that the highest life of God can be lived in the lowliest and poorest conditions. He goes forth as a man hungry and homeless that He may be one with us in our want and weakness and loneliness, and that He may teach us the life of faith in the heavenly Father.

Do you see that out of this grew the temptation that met the Lord Jesus Christ at every point? Thus comes the tempter in the wilderness, "If Thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread." But for our sakes He stands as powerless as we are, as dependent as we are, one with us. He avails Himself only of that which is ours as much as it was His,—the Word of God. "It is written, man shall not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." For our sakes He sets Himself apart and surrenders Himself utterly to a life of dependence upon the Father.

See, again, how for our sakes He sets Himself apart, *concealing His greatness and glory that He may become perfectly one with us.*

The natural dignities of the Son of God had to be hidden from us. John, the beloved disciple, he who knew the Lord more intimately than any other,—he who saw most clearly into the depths of that soul, who leaned upon the bosom of the Lord, tells us how

that he beheld the glory of the Son of God, His face like unto the sun in his strength, His eyes like unto flames of fire ; and John fell at His feet as dead. Thus was it on the Mount of Transfiguration, when for a moment the innate glory of the Son of God shone through the veil that hid it, and his robes were white and glistening, and again His face was like the sun, and again His eyes were like unto flames of fire, and the disciples, blinded and bewildered by such splendour, hid themselves, afraid, and shrank from that excess of light. Think of Him then, for our sakes setting apart His glory that He might become our blessed Brother and Friend, and that all might draw near to Him and be at home with Him ; sitting down with lowly fishermen, welcoming the outcast, gathering to Himself the little children, drawing around Him all the sad and needy of the earth.

Out of this comes the other great temptation that assails Him. " If Thou be the Son of God, if Thou art not bound by these laws of humanity, if Thou canst dismay and bewilder Thine enemies by the manifestations of Thy glory, put forth Thy power, assert Thine authority." Think of Him as He stands with outstretched hand rebuking Peter, there in the shadow of Gethsemane, on that night, the full moon of the Passover high in the heavens, about Him the rough crowd gathered with swords and staves. Judas has betrayed his Lord with a kiss, and the soldiers step forward to lay their hands upon

the Saviour, when Peter draws his sword to fight for the Lord. "Thinkest thou not," said Jesus, "that I can even now pray to the Father, and He will presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" But He sanctified Himself, setting Himself apart for our sakes.

Think, again, how it met Him on the Cross. From out the crowd that gathered about the city walls there rings the fierce derision, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross." Others have suffered perhaps as cruel a martyrdom, others have hung in anguish, mocked and derided, but of all that ever went forth to die, He only could say, "I lay down My life. No man taketh it from Me." This is the glory and triumph of Christ, that conscious of a power which could have achieved so sublime and instant a triumph over all His foes,—His cross transformed into a throne, about Him all His holy angels, and He seated amidst the terrors of judgment summoning these His murderers to His feet,—for our sakes He set Himself apart and hung upon His cross and sunk until there came the last dreadful cry, "It is finished."

Then, notice, this sanctification, this setting apart, is *through the truth*. A third temptation assailed Him which reveals this aspect. The tempter, baffled thus far, drew near yet again. "If Thou wilt go forth with all these human conditions and limitations,

there is a short and easy path by which Thou canst make the world Thine own. Behold the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. They are mine. They shall be Thine,—Thine, to fill them at once with peace and blessedness. There is no need for the cross, no need for its shame and agony—the long process of the ages in which Thy glories shall be so slowly won, and at such cost, while still men sin and sorrow, and still there is pain, and sickness, and burden, and dismay, and heartbreak, and despair. Thou canst full well deliver the world now and here. Thou hast come to humble Thyself; Thou hast come to make Thyself of no reputation, and to take upon Thyself the form of a slave. Spare Thyself that public agony, that prolonged anguish. For one moment only acknowledge my authority;—fall down and worship me, and the world is Thine.”

But He is set apart by the truth, girt and held by it. He cannot move from it, cannot speak or act apart from it. “It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” Thus for our sakes He sanctified Himself.

Let us go on to consider His desire for our sanctification. Do you see that life finds its very meaning and worth in this surrender of ourselves for the sake of others? There must be the coming in of a higher motive to restrain the lower. The thought of others must save us from the selfish promptings of life. It

is the devoted life that is the expanded and enlarged life. We must go out of ourselves to possess ourselves.

I happened once to be seated in the train when an inspector passed with a very pretty flower in his buttonhole. Presently there came along a drunken fellow, and as he went by the inspector he snatched at the flower and flung it under the train. I watched the inspector's face flush, and his fist was clenched, but turning with an effort he went on his way. As he passed the door of my carriage I said, "You took that splendidly." He nodded his head, and replied, "*If I had not been on duty, sir, I would have knocked his head off.*" *On duty*, that is what one wants, the incoming of another force that beats back and restrains the angry promptings of one's heart.

A Christian is always *on duty*. I carry the glory and honour of my Lord. I am set apart for that, and that must not suffer at my hands.

I heard some time since of an oculist who was very fond of cricket. But he had given it up, much as he enjoyed it, for he found that it affected the delicacy of his touch, and for the sake of those whom he sought to relieve he sanctified himself, and set himself apart. That is what we want,—that there shall come into our lives a force that prompts us always to be at our best and readiest for service, our fullest and richest to help, a tree that is always in leaf, and always in bloom, and always laden with its

fruit, like the orange tree, where the beauty of the blossom meets with its fragrance the mellow glory of the fruit.

See this revealed more fully and more beautifully still where the life is yet more devoted to another. How many a girl one has known whose life has been empty, frivolous, a weary round of distraction. But there comes the devotion of love, and then the crowning bliss of motherhood. Ah, the heights and depths into which that life expands, the sweet solemnities and sacredness of things, the great glad seriousness in that surrender for the little one. The life is sanctified, set apart and sacred. The things that seemed to be everything are forgotten, and all that seemed aforetime drudgery and weariness has become a great deep satisfaction that brims for ever into joy.

And the fullest life of all and the richest is ours when we set ourselves apart for the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, to belong to Him, surrendered through and through us.

How then may this sanctification be ours? Listen to the words of the apostle, in which earth's most sacred relationship is made to set forth the claims of the Saviour upon us, and His desire and purpose concerning us. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it to Himself." Do not let the great salvation of Jesus Christ mean less to us

than it does to Him. It must be with a sense of grief that He sees us content with anything less than an utter surrender to Himself, that utter surrender of ourselves which He has set Himself to accomplish.

Can you think of some schoolmistress setting herself to win the hearts of the children about her? One child is exact in her obedience, precise in her punctuality, perfect in her lessons, faultless in her behaviour, rigidly neat in her appearance, but it is all the outcome of cold duty. Another little one gives herself wholly to her mistress with a love that can separate nothing from the thought of her; to grieve her is agony, to please her is joy; to be near her is the fullest payment for all the little one can do.

It is not enough for us to bring to the Lord Jesus the precise holding of a creed; the formal observance of our devotions, rigid and unsparing; the round of duties, nothing neglected and nothing undone. His love can only rest in the glad surrender of ourselves to Him for His service with all the joyful captivity of love. "*The love of Christ constraineth me.*"

And yet this surrender is not to be vague and indefinite. As the train glides along so easily because its wheels are on the fixed and rigid iron rails, so in this setting apart of ourselves for the service of the Lord Jesus Christ we must ever get on the lines which He has laid down. First, a life of simple dependence upon the will of God. As with Him so with us, there must be a happy abandonment of our-

selves to the Father's care. This will check all the hungry over-eagerness of life, all that keen and cruel competition out of which so much of the evil of our time has come ; it will destroy envy and covetousness and the scornfulness of pride. Set apart for the Lord Jesus Christ, our lives shall be in nothing a hindrance nor in any way a burden to those around us.

Then, too, we are to surrender ourselves to Him for the welfare of others, even as He set Himself apart for us. There shall be no soaring up to the pinnacle of the Temple, whence we look down from the lofty heights of our own goodness, pitying the ignorant or scorning the sinful. There are two ways in which men try to do good. There is stooping from a great height with a large show of condescension to lift people up. *That* is to undo far more than it does. And there is the simple brotherliness that becomes part of the life about us, belonging to it and seeking in every way simply to bring into it something of blessedness and help. When Jesus Christ said, "Ye are the salt of the earth," He did not mean that we were to lie in a silver salt-cellar carefully smoothed over and resenting anything that ruffled our surfaces, nor did He mean that we were to give ourselves away in mouthfuls, as some people give good advice. He meant that we are to lose ourselves in being lightly sprinkled, so as to keep sweet and make savoury the things about us.

And yet once more. This life is to be kept sanctified, separate, set apart *by the truth*. It means a stern, rigid, unfaltering loyalty to Jesus Christ. We think of the truth as a thing that is spoken or thought; Jesus Christ thought of the truth as a thing that is *lived*. "*I am the truth.*" Sanctified by the truth means this one thing—to be true to Jesus Christ. The tempter comes proposing perpetual compromises to spare pain, trouble, worry; to gain by some slight sacrifice of right a quicker victory for good; to admit a little of the questionable in something for a great gain in everything. "Pass this by," says the tempter; "acknowledge me in this for the sake of the good that you will do." Here we are bound, here we have no choice. Set apart and held by everything that is most sacred in God's world, we are girt with a tremendous force that cannot yield. This must it mean to us as to Him, that we will face all shame and loss, all agony and death, even the death of the cross, sooner than be false to Him in thought or word, or deed.

"*For their sakes,*" said Jesus Christ. "*For His sake,*" say we. That is our inspiration. The life of complete surrender is in Him and in Him alone. To know Him, to commune with Him, to rest in His love, to have and hold it as our own, that is the secret of the surrendered life.

THE STORY OF A ROYAL PROCESSION

“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.”—*St. Luke*
xix. 1.

IX

THE STORY OF A ROYAL PROCESSION

I

IT was in the fair city of Jericho, gay with its palaces, beautiful with its palms and abundant growth of trees. The whole place was stirred with excitement. The company of those who were going up to the Passover was in itself enough to make much ado, but the excitement was greatly increased by the presence of Jesus Christ, the Prophet of Nazareth, whose fame had gone through all the land, and of whose miracles everybody was talking. We read in the eleventh verse of the universal expectation that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear. The popular belief was that this Son of David would presently sit on David's throne, and restore again the Kingdom to Israel,—that indeed Jesus was now on His way to claim the Kingdom for His own. .

I remember to have read that when Napoleon the Great was on his way to Russia, men, women, and children stood contentedly for days and nights, wait-

ing to see him pass along his way ; and a story is told of some clergyman in the far north of Scotland, who trudged on foot all the way to London in order to see the Duke of Wellington, and when he had seen him he quietly thanked God and trudged home again, counting himself well rewarded. We can understand then the eager excitement that filled Jericho at this time. Every place was crowded ; everybody who could manage to get where there was a chance of seeing Him, waited for Him. Look forth upon the crowd, the Scribes and Pharisees, the groups of Roman soldiers dreading an outbreak of this turbulent people, eager women lifting their little ones, rough men pushing others back for their own advantage. See how they throng the housetops, and how they cluster and crowd along the walls, while the narrow street is full of a surging host.

Yet of all these who have come forth to see Jesus, two, and two only, shall really see Him.

It is of these two that I would tell, the one at one end of Jericho, the other at the other end ; the one as Jesus went in, the other as He went out. The one was Bartimæus, and the other Zaccheus. They were very unlike, the one poor, the other rich,—the one known only as a beggar to be pitied and helped ; the other a detested publican, hated because of his calling. But they were alike in this, the difficulty that they had in seeing Jesus. For Zaccheus was short of stature and could not see over

anybody's head even in those simple times, when men did not wear tall hats and the women did not wear yet taller ones. And Bartimæus could not see at all for he was blind. Now of all men who should come to see the procession these surely were the last, blind Bartimæus and little Zaccheus. Let us see how they fare. And first we turn to the story of the blind beggar.

At the gate entering into Jericho the crowd is thickest. The stately palms and balsam trees that give the place its wealth stand out against the white walls of the city. And everywhere the eye falls upon hosts of people. Look over them all and say who among them shall get the best view. Those above the city gate shall look down upon Him. Those on the housetops and those in the front rank of the crowd will see Him well. No, not those shall have the best view. Away there behind all the people sits a blind man begging. He shall come nearest to Jesus and he shall see best.

Now Jesus comes. His name is buzzed by every tongue, the excitement grows until it bursts forth in a great cry. What now shall the blind man do? There are two things that he can do and everything depends on which of the two it is.

He can sit there and sigh, "Oh dear, how dreadful it is to be like I am! I do wish I could see Him, but I am blind, and if I tried to get to Him there would

not be a chance in a crowd like this. I have nobody to lead me, and if I went groping along I should only get elbowed back for my trouble, and if I got into the crowd I should be swept hither and thither, and very likely trodden underfoot and killed. Alas, there is no chance for me."

So is it that some sit to-day. Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. The Almighty Saviour is within reach. The meaning of this service, like the meaning of that crowd of old, is that the Almighty Saviour is in our midst. He who has helped and healed and blessed ten thousand thousand souls is at hand. And what are you doing? Do you sit thinking of your hindrances and difficulties? "Ah me, I am blind, blind; I do not understand these things, I do not know how to get to Him, and if I tried I should be sure to fail." If the blind man had done that, we should have heard nothing about him, that is certain. What is the other thing he can do, *and does*? "Who is it?" asked the blind man, feeling the excitement in the very air. And they tell him that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. "What! Jesus of Nazareth, the great Prophet, He who healed the blind man and cleansed the leper? Then why should I not be made whole?" And instantly, loud above the tumult rings the cry, "*Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*"

Those about him turn angrily upon him, "Hold thy peace."

"Whatever for?" he asks. "When He was away

in Jerusalem I might be quiet, but now, now that He is so near and within my reach I certainly shall not hold my peace. Only a minute or two and He will be gone. "*Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*"

"Tell that blind beggar to be quiet," say a score of others.

"Ah, it is all very well for you. You can see. But if I am blind I may well ask Him for my sight, and if I am poor there is the more need for pity."

"Hold thy noise. He is busy talking to the people and we cannot hear Him."

"Well," cried the sturdy beggar, "you can see Him, and I cannot do that. Think how much I am losing. Have mercy, have mercy, Thou Son of David."

"Hold thy noise," says another, "thy case is hopeless, a man so old as thou art and so blind, what is the good of thy calling after Him?"

"If He saved others He can save me. Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me."

He could do nothing but cry aloud. The leper could come springing in before Him; the poor woman could come in the press and silently take the hem of the garment; but Bartimæus can only lift up his voice, and that he will and does. "Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me." My brother, would to God I could rouse you to do as he did of old. If you have greater needs than others, then you surely have a greater claim. Say within yourself, "If I

can bring nothing else to Jesus, I can come with a cry for help." We can come to heaven's gate with nothing better than such an appeal for pity.

Look at him again, the blind beggar sitting by the wayside. *What did he know?* Why he knew that he was blind and he knew that Jesus was passing by. That was all and that was enough. Ah! how little knowledge it needs to find Jesus if only the heart longs after Him. He might have sat there perplexing himself as to the way in which it could be done, saying, "Until I understand it all it is no good to ask." No, no, his business was but to cry aloud, the Son of David knew all the rest. When we have an all-wise physician to deal with we need not trouble ourselves much about our symptoms. *See how little he could do.* He could but ask for what he wanted and he could take what was given him. He was a beggar and the less he could *do* the better he could beg. *Look how little he had*,—only a pair of blind eyes which he turned as if imploring pity, and a voice that could cry, "Have mercy, have mercy upon me." It is good to be a blind beggar when the King goes by. It is good to be a blind beggar when the Almighty Saviour is at hand. His want is his wealth; his need is his plea. He had room for the Saviour's help and the Saviour's healing. And that is all he needs.

And now let us turn to see how the blind man fared. Jesus stood still. What a moment was this

in which to arrest the steps of the King of Glory ! Read what is written just before this incident. " And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them, and they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid, and He took again the twelve and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him unto the Gentiles : and they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him and shall spit upon Him and shall kill Him ! If ever there was a time when the Lord Jesus might have been all taken up in His own grief it was now, crushed by the thought of such agony as that which awaited Him and such as none else had ever known. But lo, the blind man's cry reaches His ear, and instantly all else is forgotten. All the soul of Christ yearns to pity and heal him. What then waits for us as we come to Him now, since He has entered into His glory, now that He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him, now when He is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on High, having leisure to listen to the cry and all power to help.

" *And He commanded him to be called.*" Think of all that royal procession kept waiting over the needs of a blind beggar ! The name of Bartimæus is on everybody's lips. All those who had reproved him

are now quite eager to have the honour of helping him. A score of hands are stretched out and a score of voices cry, "Be of good cheer, He calleth thee." Bartimæus is the most important person in Jericho now. When Jesus Christ is for us it matters very little how many may be against us. When He is ours we are always in the majority, and He can quickly turn the hearts of those about us to befriend and bless us. Thus led on his way by quite a little crowd of helpers, everybody falling back before him as if he had been a prince, the blind man stands face to face with the Lord.

And Jesus said, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? Look at it, the blind beggar and the very King of Glory, and lo, the King doth set all the wisdom and love and power of God at the disposal of the beggar. "Lord," cried the blind man, "that I should receive my sight." Here is the man who had the best view. The others saw it only, but the blind man felt those blessed fingers laid upon his eyes. The others heard it only as if from without. He drank the rapturous music into his soul, "Be opened," and there flashed before him the glorious vision of the Lord. "Go thy way," saith Jesus: "thy faith hath made thee whole."

That is the Gospel for us every one. If it means anything at all, it means that Jesus Christ has come into the world to do *impossible* things. Think you the Son of God should come into our midst and take

upon Himself our need and reveal Himself as our Brother unless it were to undo our curse and misery? What should He do with that Almighty power if it be not to help those who need helping and who seek it at His hands,—to cast out the devils of drink and lust and pride,—to heal broken hearts and to mend ruined homes,—to bring to blind souls the vision of God's glory and beauty,—to bestow upon us the joy of reconciliation with God, the past forgiven and the future lit up with the promise of eternal blessedness?

The Gospel of God means that or it means nothing and less than nothing. If it is a thing of words and names and creeds, a mere text for endless sermons, let it go. Life is too real, too short, too tragic, too miserable, too awful for such trifling. And if there be within reach a power that can bring into our lives true goodness, the strength and blessedness of a great love,—if all this is to be had for the simple earnest seeking, shall we not lift up our hearts, blind though we be and helpless, crying, "Thou Son of David have mercy upon me"?

II

LET us continue the story of the royal procession. Again we must set before ourselves the scene of the busy city, with hosts of eager people crowding the housetops and thronging all the road in order to catch a glimpse of Jesus Christ. We have followed

the fortune of the blind man who sat at the entrance to Jericho and have seen how well he fared. Now we turn to the man short of stature, *Zaccheus the publican*.

First, let us listen to what the Pharisees say of him. They have not a good word for him. A man that is a sinner, *the sinner*, the worst in all Jericho.

There are four things that we know about Zaccheus, and each of the four help to make his case more desperate. He was a publican. He was the chief of the publicans. He was rich. And last of all he was little. Now it was quite bad enough to be a publican. That to begin with was as bad as anybody need be. Even with us the rate collector is not the most welcome person who comes to the door, and the most charitable of us does not consider the authorities who manage these matters the most considerate persons in the world; and with us, where such things are carefully watched and justly administered, there is often a too ready advantage taken of simple people. But it is impossible for us to understand the feeling of the nation towards these tax-gatherers of old.

Imagine for a moment, although it take more imagination than most Englishmen possess,—imagine us conquered by a foreign power, France or Germany, and the taxes are bought for a certain sum, and those who bought them are at liberty to charge what they

can get on everything, and if you refuse to pay you are led before a representative of this foreign power, and will probably be punished in such a way as shall encourage others to pay without demur whatever was demanded. And the money thus raised was used in keeping up the yoke of the detested conqueror. A man who could take such a post was accounted by the proud Pharisees as the very chief of sinners, accursed of God and man. They shrank from touching such a man. They would not go into his house, nor would they suffer him to come into theirs. His presence was a defilement. They always classed together publicans and sinners. The outcast woman was amongst women what the publican was amongst men. And this Zaccheus was the chief of the publicans,—by his very prominence drawing upon himself the greater hatred and contempt.

And he was rich. Everybody saw in his wealth the proof of his iniquity and of their own wrongs. And to crown and complete it all he was *little*. It is very curious how much morality there is in stature. I have noticed scores of times that a great man may do what a little man must not. To be called a "great scoundrel" is rather a distinction. The uttermost term of contempt and scorn is in the phrase *A little scoundrel*.

This then is the man of whom, when the Pharisees condescend to speak at all, they hiss out the words,

"He is a sinner," as if there were not another in Jericho. And when they wanted to commend themselves to Heaven, with haughty strut and spotless robes, they lifted up their eyes and thanked God that they were not as other men,—not as this Zaccheus. Poor Zaccheus, we do not wonder that he tried so long to see Jesus and could not. The words mean that he kept trying to see Him, but every time he came near the crowd everybody thought he owed him a grudge and elbowed him back and thrust him aside. It is wonderful how *little* people keep getting in everybody's way. Big people never do, you know.

Now let us turn to see what we may think of this man. I am afraid it shows how much of the Pharisee there is in us that we are so ready to accept their opinion of him. But the publican was not necessarily a scoundrel and a traitor. Do you remember that once, as Jesus passed along His way in Capernaum by the little harbour amidst the boats and fishermen, there sat one busied with the tolls as the goods passed on their way, watchful, careful, exact, receiving and duly recording what was required? And as Jesus passed him He laid His hand upon this man's shoulder, and said, "Follow Me," and henceforth among the twelve we find Matthew the publican. And it is perhaps due to his clerkly habits as publican that we owe the earliest of the Gospels, the Gospel according to St. Matthew the publican. At the great feast which

Matthew gave in honour of Jesus, "behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with His disciples." And Jesus was much more at home there than He ever was in the houses of the Pharisees. So we can begin to think better of this publican.

And more than that. Look at this Zaccheus again. Listen to him. I am not sure that we have not seen him before. I am not sure that we have not heard his voice sometime ago. Do you remember that when John was baptizing in this neighbourhood, amongst those who came at the summons of the Baptist to repent and prepare for the Kingdom of God there was a company of publicans? Amongst that company I think I see one, short of stature, right in the front, here, as ever, eager, energetic, determined. He who was so resolved to see Jesus was equally resolved aforetime to see John. And now one speaks for the others. Listen, is it not the voice of Zaccheus their chief? "Master, what shall *we* do?" What is the answer? Does the prophet of fire turn upon them with looks of anger, and does he thunder sternly, "Apostates, traitors, thieves, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come! Leave your miserable calling and enter it no more." Not at all. He bade them go back to their calling and work at it, and only be careful to exact no more than their due. That day, I think, one man went on his way resolving that henceforth that should be the rule of

his life, and he did it, and more,—how much more there was only one man in Jericho who knew. Hear what he has to say, for he knows most about it, and has a right to speak. “Zaccheus gives half of his goods to the poor,” says he, “and if he ever wrongs any man he takes care to restore him fourfold.”

And this is the man they call a sinner and a scoundrel. Ah, happy Zaccheus! Whilst these Pharisees had a round of religious worship, long prayers and trumpeted alms and stately strut and precise letter of the law, here was a man who went down and lived a right life. They boasted that they gave a tenth of their goods (would that most of us were Pharisees in that respect). This man gave a half. They thanked God that they were not as this publican. It would have been a blessed thing for them if they had been. Happy Zaccheus! He did not carry his religion in his tones. So many people do. He did not carry his religion in his looks. It is all so many people have. He did not carry his religion in his clothes. How much of our religion lies in our Sunday clothes! This man’s religion ran right through his dealings with his brother man, ran into everything, purging it and purifying it and hallowing it all into the service and worship of God.

Nothing is commoner, and nothing is more miserable than to make religion into a matter of beliefs, of days, of creeds and churches. Days, creeds, churches,

beliefs, services, are no good under heaven unless they strengthen us for the service of God right through the whole of the life work. And yet these Pharisees had no room for Zaccheus in the church, and they had no room for him in their charity. They hissed out "sinner,"—and if there were a saint in Jericho that day it was Zaccheus. He was a whole heaven above them in all that was real and true and good and Godlike.

Alas, it is so easy for us to be like them,—to make religion a thing of services and creeds and days and places, and then to crush with hard words and bitter looks those who do not agree with us. Blind leaders of the blind! Alas, how often poor Zaccheus goes on his way, shunned and shrunk from, and it is we who ought to be ashamed and confounded if we could see things rightly. There are fireplaces that send all the heat roaring up the chimney, and never have any to spare to warm any poor body's hands, or to boil any poor body's kettle, or to bake any poor body's bread. So fervently religious on Sundays, flaming up to heaven, and then, what? My dear sir, you tell me how you pray. But tell me how you speak to the little children. *That* is the measure of your religion. You tell me where you go on Sundays. Tell me how you are at the desk or in the workshop on the Monday. Is the servant faithful, and the master as careful about the interests of others as he is of his own? Who

cares for the Sunday worship if he who kneels in church goes home to be proud, harsh, exacting, ill-tempered? The religion of Sunday is an empty sham and a rottenness, unless it helps us through the seven days of the week to be simple, self-forgetful, brave, true, brotherly, glad to help anybody anywhere.

And this is the man they called a sinner! Poor Zaccheus, he is living still. There are thousands in his place. It is the doubt and scorn of us religious people that make it often so hard for many to be good. We are always trying to bring men to a sense of sin. Workers amongst the people will tell you that their great endeavour is to bring in a breath of hope, a trembling bit of confidence. We think that we must ever preach the depravity of humanity. Do you see how glad the Lord Jesus was to perceive and commend everything that was good? "Oh woman, great is thy faith." "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she hath loved much." The memorial of the alabaster box is to live as long as men read of Jesus, and the two mites of the poor widow is that which He calls His disciples to look at and admire. Oh, for eyes to see the goodness that is in men! Our only safety in God's world is to live a life of love. Alas, how many Herods are there still who with cruel contempt and breath of bitterness slay the Christ Child in the hearts of men!

Lct us hasten, lastly, to see what Jesus says. Here along the crowded roadway He comes. Zaccheus has heard of Him as the Prophet, he has heard of Him as the Son of David. But there is another word that fills the heart of Zaccheus. Jesus has called Himself "The friend of publicans and sinners." And now the Saviour stands beneath the sycamore tree. Instantly that Face is turned up towards him. Again all the procession is stopped, all the crowd is silenced, and on the still air there rings the word, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, I must abide at thy house to-day." "Mine, Lord, mine!" cried Zaccheus, as joyfully he swung himself down from the tree and leapt to the Master's feet. Instantly there burst the angry murmur of the crowd, like a sea, "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." But Jesus laid His hand upon that shoulder and Zaccheus, looking into his Master's face, is compelled to speak in no boastful pride, but in reply to those mutterings about him. "Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man I restore him fourfold." Oh, earth's bravest knight and truest gentleman was Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the champion always of the outcast and the scorned. Immediately facing that angry crowd, He cried, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Come to seek Zaccheus ! He had sought to see Jesus, and lo, he finds that Jesus has come to seek him ! Sometime ago I had a long talk with a water-finder, who by means of a hazel rod could find springs, and he told me that when he came near to the stream that was below the earth the stick turned toward it and led him on until he stood over the spring. I do not pretend to understand that mystery, but I can think it is thus that the great brotherly instinct of Jesus Christ is ever conscious of the nearness of a soul that longs after Him,—ever moving irresistibly nearer to it until He stands within reach of it and meets it with His great salvation.

Of all the people in Jericho that day who went forth to see Jesus there were after all only two who really saw Him. Others saw only the outward appearance, His form, His looks, but the blind man and Zaccheus knew His heart. We think the truth is a thing to be *seen*. No, it is a thing to be sought, and bought, and earned, and possessed,—nay, rather to possess us,—and the price you pay for it is ever a heart that longs for it and a resolute purpose that seeks it.

These are the men who shall see Jesus. These two, who *must* find Him ; who will not be turned aside by any difficulties. And thus to seek Him, blessed be God, is always to find.

Think of Zaccheus as he went on His way that day with the Lord Jesus Christ. Little! No, indeed, the greatest man in Jericho if a man is known by his friends. Lonely no more, but having now on his side to help and gladden him that Almighty Saviour,—feeling as he walks at the Saviour's side that innermost sympathy which words can only belittle and bedim. What mattered it now what the Pharisees said? What mattered it now who was against him? *For* him was the glorious Son of God Who had come to seek and to save that which was lost,—his for ever and ever. “He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.” That is how He makes His saints—by giving us Himself, by going home with us, by making us know His great love, by giving us His abiding presence as our strength, our peace, our joy.

THE SAINTS OF CÆSAR'S HOUSEHOLD

“All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar’s household.”—*Phil.* iv. 22.

X

THE SAINTS OF CÆSAR'S HOUSEHOLD

IT is the *chiefly* upon which I want to lay the stress—that the warmest and most loving salutation should have come from the unlikeliest place.

Let us look at the man who is writing the message.

St. Paul is sending a letter to the Church at Philippi. He sits in all the rude discomforts of a prison, writing amidst much difficulty, secured by a coupling chain to a soldier.

These men were commonly rough bullies and brutes, who, by all the horrors of the battlefield and many sights of cruelty, had been trained to make light of suffering. The prisoner is a man singularly sensitive, refined, and scholarly. Restlessly active, he is incapable of doing anything by halves. Like all men who succeed greatly, he sets himself to do one thing, and that the most splendid that ever a man sought to accomplish—to make known Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and he brings every thought of his mind and every energy of his life into

perfect discipline for the fulfilment of this purpose. To such a man how galling, how maddening was it to be thus shut up day after day, chained and bound by such enforced companionship to a Roman soldier—a man corrupt, cruel, foul, angry at every movement of the chain that bound them, ready to curse him irritably by all his gods, and finding in the sufferings of this helpless stranger a hideous sport.

And to St. Paul it must have seemed sometimes that Christianity itself was likely to be destroyed unless he could go forth to proclaim its glorious freedom. Not only were the Jews everywhere madly plotting against it in every way, but, worse than that, the Jewish converts were seeking to make the religion of Jesus Christ only another Judaism, and were compelling the Christian converts to adopt Jewish customs, to submit to Jewish ordinances, and to be encumbered with all the cruel bondage of the Jewish Law. At such a time this man is shut up in a dungeon!

What then, is this life wasted? Look at him as he sits in his prison, the chain rattling as he moves his hand wearily, the gloom of the prison making it difficult to see. He is preaching in this prison to a greater congregation than could ever be gathered in the market place or on Mars' Hill. At that hour, when time seemed to stand still, he was preaching to all the ages. And this day this word is ours because Paul was in prison.

God knows how to have us at our best if we will only let Him. "Your Father is the Husbandman." And He puts the seed into the earth: prisoned and dungeoned in the dark it may be, but only that it shall yield the flower and fruit. Ask John Bunyan what was the best thing that ever happened to him. How his face brightens as he tells you, "The best thing that ever happened to me was my going to Bedford Gaol, for there I got my chance to write my *Pilgrim's Progress*."

God sets too much store by us not to turn us to the best account. The one best gift that we can ask, or that He can give us, is to let Him have His own way with us perfectly.

Take away the books that St. Paul wrote in the prison, and how infinite our loss would be!

But of this ministry in the dungeon the fruit was not only afar off in the future, *it was immediate*. Bound to the soldier, and waited on by the slaves of Cæsar's household, Paul found a constant opportunity of telling those about him of his Saviour. And much more than talking of Jesus, he lived a life that outshone his sermons and revealed that Christ Who, as he says, was formed in him. Think of the soldier who comes in turn to guard this prisoner, cursing the fate that has withdrawn him from his pleasures, finding a wild excitement in lust and wine and the bloody scenes of the arena. Now he sits watching his prisoner; to him this man chained at his side

seems to have found the secret of happiness. The soldier bends over to see what this is that he writes, and reads with wonder : " Not that I speak in respect of want : for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me." And he does not only write it—anybody could do that—but he looks it, sings it, lives it. Little wonder that one and another come to ask this prisoner to tell them more of this Jesus of Nazareth Who had wrought such great things, and in Whom he found a life of such sweet contentment and such perpetual joy.

So it was that there gathered there, right under the shadow of Cæsar's palace, a little company who joined the Apostle Paul in prayer and praise, and heard from his lips the great message of the love of God to them in Jesus Christ.

To-day he tells this little company about the Christians at Philippi to whom he is writing ; tells them of Lydia, the first convert to Christianity in Europe, of the girl possessed with the spirit of divination, of the tumult that arose, of his being cast into prison ; and, as he remembers that night, it may well be that Paul again bursts out into the song that rang within that dungeon and cheered its gloom. Then

follows the story of the earthquake and the gaoler. As he finishes the story, this little company of slaves from Cæsar's household look into his face and say to him, "Give our love to the brothers and sisters at Philippi. Tell them that we have been hearing of them, and that we have joined with you in prayer and praise on their behalf." And so St. Paul has to add another verse to his letter: "All the saints salute you, chiefly those that are of Cæsar's household." "There," he asks, "will that do?" And their eyes flash and their hearts glow with the joy of the love that binds them to that far-off brotherhood.

What a mistake we make when we think or act as if we thought that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not perfectly fitted for the worst and lowest of men! The Saviour ever drew unto Himself the publicans and sinners. His holiness did not repel, but attracted, the outcast and fallen; and the common people ever heard Him gladly.

Every great revival of religion that has stirred the Churches and uplifted the nation has begun amongst these. What becomes of our poor distinctions whenever we have to deal with the great gifts of God, Who is no respecter of persons? The sun shines as brightly upon the cottage as upon the palace; the light falls as gently upon the plough-boy who wakes at dawn as upon the prince. The breath of heaven comes as graciously to the milkmaid who sings in the

meadow as to the Queen herself. Made of the same flesh and blood, theirs are the same wants, the same fears, the same sorrows, the same longings. We seem to need a new movement in every generation to teach the stiff and stereotyped Churches that nowhere has the Gospel found a heartier reception or a more devoted submission than amongst the lowest and poorest and neediest. The saints of Cæsar's household salute us. They send us their love, and bid us be sure to find a place in our ministry and service for their successors in all ages.

Let us turn the words round to think of those of whom St. Paul writes, *the saints of Cæsar's household*—certainly the last place to which we should go to look for saints.

The saints—where shall we look for them? I have seen their portraits—they are commoner than the originals. They walked the earth in robes that seem to proclaim their sanctity—for we all know how very much religion there may be in clothes. Their eyes were set on heaven in holy meditation. Their hands were clasped as if in fixed and unbroken devotion. Theirs were not the rough ways of the earth, never soiled by contact with its foulness—living away from the world, they dwelt in sacred solitude. They held communion with the host above. Within the sacred atmosphere that encompassed them there came no din of earth's disturbance; no evil presence entered

to distract the ardour of their devotion; no coarse concerns of common life defiled the sweet solemnities amidst which they dwelt. Such is the picture. But what have we here? *The saints of Cæsar's household!*

To begin with, Rome at that time was the most unlikely place in the world to look for a saint. No language could utter the depth of abomination to which it had sunk. "It was Rome at the epoch of her most gorgeous gluttonies and her most gilded rottenness." Historians have described the Rome of that day as a cesspool of iniquity, a filthy sewer into which flowed all the abominable dregs of the heathen world. Dean Farrar has given us a picture of Rome as corrupted by the pollutions of the stage, hardened and brutalised by the cruelties of the arena, terrorised by insolent soldiers and pauperised mobs, and overrun by the vilest slaves. It presented at this period a condition of things unparalleled for foulness and misery in the annals of the world. Its sensuality was more shameful and more shameless than has ever been heard of in history. They who shrank from its seething corruption turned with a stoical scorn that added to its anguish the gloom of despair. Think of it—saints in Rome!

And of all its people the most miserable was the lot of the slave. So many of these were there that they could only be kept in subjection by the most terrible severity. One of them, roused by unutter-

able wrongs, had murdered his master. To avenge that murder, no less than four hundred slaves were executed.

We read of one Roman who had 20,000 of these slaves, and it was no extraordinary thing for one household to have many hundreds, so that amongst them were slaves whose duty it was to keep the others in silence, and others whose work it was to tell the master their names. So absolutely were they in the hands of their owners that they could be abused or tortured or killed without a word of protest or a shadow of protection. The satirist tells us how that the Roman lady sat in her beauty at the banquet, the very picture of loveliness, but the slave girl who had given a curl of her hair a wrong turn had already been branded with a hot iron. He describes the banquet as sparkling with jewellery, but if the slave should accidentally let fall a crystal vase, then and there, without ado, he could be flung into the master's fishpond to feed his master's lampreys. Amongst all this it is that we find these saints.

To complete it all they were slaves in *Cæsar's household*. This Cæsar was Nero—a very monster in iniquity. There was no abomination of which this man had not been guilty. "A wholesale robber, an intriguer, a murderer, a liar, a coward, a drunkard, a glutton, unutterably depraved, he was that last, worst specimen of human wickedness—a man who, not content with every existing form of vice and sin, had

become an inventor of evil things." He had poisoned the rightful heir to the throne in order himself to usurp it; he had married the sister of the murdered heir, only in turn to break her heart by his brutality, and at last had ordered her assassination. His own mother had been murdered at his bidding, and the list of his victims it would take long barely to sum up. He had reduced Rome itself to ashes, and then laid the blame of it upon the innocent Christians, and tortured them to death by hundreds in terrible martyrdom.

Here it is, then, where the example and influence of this monster had poisoned the very atmosphere—within the walls of Nero's palace—that a little company of his own slaves gather in loving fellowship around Paul the prisoner, and send their loving greeting to the Church at Philippi.

To us, too, the saints of Cæsar's household send their greetings.

There are those whose position seems to make Christianity a difficulty—they may think sometimes, perhaps, almost an impossibility. The claims of society, the cruel scorn of companions, the misunderstanding and ridicule to which they are exposed are sometimes too much to endure. My brother, my sister, these saints of Cæsar's household salute you. What think you would *they* count these hindrances of which you make so much? There, where hosts of

spies sought to gain favour by betraying those about them, where to be a Christian meant to be exposed at any moment to martyrdom !

Think of that little group gathering to-day. Look in upon it. There are gaps in the circle. Where is the youth whose face last Sunday was lit up with rapturous joy as he told of his love for his Lord ? Where is the gentle maiden whose testimony to her Saviour kindled the love of all as they listened ? Where is the old man who was accustomed to lead their devotions ? Ah ! to-day they are gone forth to be flung to the lions ; and this little company has stolen together to pray that God would keep them true. Listen ! for it is not only to pray, but to praise Him Whose great love made them more than conquerors.

And is there no room to-day for any heroism for Jesus Christ ? Is it only feeble ones who now are wanted in the ranks of that Saviour Who laid down His life for us ? We have a goodly heritage. This holy religion has come down to us through the succession of a noble army of martyrs. And now our turn has come. Are we going to falter and fear ? Shame upon our shame ! Let us put on a new courage, and afresh give ourselves to the Lord, to be His utterly, wholly, always, only His.

And yet again, others shrink in fear of themselves. " I, alas ! am so timid," say they, " so cowardly. I wish I had the heroism and endurance that could

make me a worthy soldier and servant of Jesus Christ." Surely, again, these saints of Cæsar's household salute you!

"Oh, brother, sister, talk not thus. Think you that we of ourselves were so brave or so courageous? We, indeed, of ourselves were timid; we shrank, afraid. But the great love of God kindled within us a love that cast out all fear."

My brothers, He Who made them strong is ours. Shall He be to us only a name Who was to them such strength—a creed only, and not a conquering might? To know Him is to be strong; to commune with Him is to have our triumph assured; to love Him is to be more than conqueror.

And yet again, does it seem to some that their sphere is so little, so narrow, so lowly, that there is no room for any service for God? Again the saints of Cæsar's household salute you.

Come, then, stirred by the example of this company in Cæsar's household, let us to-day surrender ourselves to Jesus Christ, pledging ourselves afresh to Him, to be His faithful witnesses, His brave disciples, followers of those who through faith and patience have inherited the promises,

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

“The little children.”—*St. Mark* x. 14.

XI

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

THINK how the child element in the Bible makes its claim upon the human heart. Go through the Book and take out of it all the tender and exquisite references to the children, how much would be lost!

We might have expected that the Word of God would have no place for the children—that its pages would be filled with the sublime revelations of the Most High and the records of His bravest soldiers and servants, or that it would be a volume of precepts and commandments. How significant it is that the gracious Father, who finds a place for the little ones in His Kingdom, finds so much room for them in His Word.

It has been said by some that the sublimest sentence ever penned is that in the story of the Creation, "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light." But I think most of us feel that we come unutterably nearer to God, and know very

much more of our Father in reading the wonderful words, "*God heard the voice of the lad.*"

What a picture it is! The stretch of desert earth, consumed by the blaze and fire of the sun; the stunted shrubs, and there, wearied and faint, the mother and her son. The water is spent, the fever burns and throbs in the veins, and now the lad falls stricken to the ground. The mother bends over him eagerly watching the life that is ebbing away; setting him under the scanty shade of a shrub, she says, "Let me not see the death of the child." All is still. With buried face the mother sits, scarcely able to hear the fevered moans of the dying child. "*God heard the voice of the lad.*" And swiftly flew the angel to open her eyes and to shew her the well of water, and the bottle is dipped into the gurgling well, and bending over him she moistens the parched lips and cools the heated brow. And the lad opens his eyes and smiles his thanks to his mother, whilst she looks up to her Father in heaven, and her heart goes forth in loving thanks to Him.

Blessed be God who has given us such a revelation of Himself as that! He for whom the world longs must be something more than the Almighty Creator, and the great Sustainer of the universe. He must bend in such infinite pity, and stretch forth such gracious help, if the world is to come to Him, saying, "Our Father, which art in Heaven." The little child must reveal Him.

We all feel how true it is the child element gives the Bible its claim upon the heart of the world. Who can measure the influence of that Bible story of the little babe born in the hut of a Hebrew slave in Egypt? We see the mother looking upon her child "exceeding beautiful," whilst her great grief chokes her, and she presses it to her heart—for the law is gone forth that the sons of the Hebrews be flung into the river. Then come the stealthy visits to the Nile by night. They fetch home the rushes and weave the ark for the child and then creep forth to lay the little one upon the bank. Then comes the dawning of that happy day and the princess and her maidens gather about the child, and it is rescued and adopted as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Such a story as that hangs imperishably in the chambers of imagery, and brings into the midst of us a new tenderness and a new love. God bless the little children who have brought such blessedness to us!

Think again how large a space the childhood of the Lord Jesus fills in the Bible. For thirty years there is but a single break in the silence concerning Him, but about the Holy Child what scenes of exquisite beauty cluster. We see the simple shepherds under that frosty night; we hear the music of the angels' song; we gather with the shepherds as they come in haste; we stand with them adoring the little Child wrapped in the swaddling clothes and

laid in the manger. We love to linger at the temple steps as old Simeon takes from the wondering Mother the blessed Babe and sings his song of Israel's redemption. And we come again to Bethlehem, led by the star, and with the wise men we kneel, and fain would lay at His feet the gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense. And yet again we follow them along their way on that dread night when Joseph and Mary take the young Child and flee from Herod's soldiers. Of all the pictures that have become graven upon the heart of the world there is none so sacredly treasured as that of the Holy Child Jesus. Who can say how much it has enriched men through all the ages with gentleness and love? Who can say how it has guarded and ennobled childhood?

Then again, in the ministry of the Lord, what a place He gave to the children! How much He finds in them to light up the love of God and to reprove our pride and care. He sits on the mount and preaches the great sermon about the heavenly Father. He picks a flower from the field and holds it up. "Look at it; if God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" He bids them listen to the birds, the chirping sparrow and croaking raven. "Think of them," saith He, "your heavenly Father feedeth them, are ye not much better than they?" Then comes the third illustration, and that applies the lesson. The break of the chapter shuts off the third

part cruelly. Look at the Lord Jesus amidst the crowd. He has told of the flowers and the birds, and now He to whom the children ever went at once stretches out His hand and draws to Himself a little wondering lad. "What man of you, if his little son ask bread, will he give a stone, or if he ask a fish will he give him a serpent, if he ask an egg will he give him a scorpion? Therefore, if ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

The world never saw anything more exquisitely beautiful than when the disciples came asking the Lord Jesus which of them should be the greatest. The question does not convey any idea of the amount of feeling that lay behind it. It was a fierceness that broke into angry dispute, and that spread to the friends of the disciples, so that the rival leaders had their followers and advocates, as we see in the case of the mother coming with the request that her two sons should occupy the first place.

It is impossible for us to imagine how it must have impressed and grieved the meek and lowly Saviour that there should be this spirit in His disciples—in those who had been with Him and had known Him as none else had done. If His disciples indulged such miserable feelings what could He expect from the world? How then shall He reprove them? Shall those eyes flash forth their most indignant

fires? Shall those lips utter His most vehement condemnation? Oh, let it live before us! There in the house of Capernaum, amidst this company of fishermen, is a little lad. And Jesus draws to Himself the child, and lays His hand tenderly upon him, and gently stroking him, He declares, "Verily I say unto you, Until ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

And yet one other scene there is that we must stay to look upon. The mothers have brought their young children to Him that He should touch them. The disciples, in their jealous care for their tired Master, would have kept them from Him, but the mothers' instinct knew Him better than His disciples. Love alone can know and interpret Him. For a moment a look of stern displeasure spread over that face. "He was much displeased." Then turning to the children with a look of love and welcome, He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," and He, the Lord of angels, He who made the round world and all that therein is, He took them up in His arms and laid His hand upon them and blessed them.

Since He loves children thus we cannot be afraid of Him. He might have preached with unearthly

authority ; He might have summoned Lazarus from the dead ; He might have wrought all His wonderful works and have spoken all His wonderful words, yet if this story had been left out we could never have known Him as we do now—the blessed Friend and gracious Brother of men. If this had been left out we should never have come to Him with the feelings that now claim Him as Saviour and Lord. To win the children is to win the world.

See how the Lord redeems men by the little child. That blessing of the Saviour is upon all the little ones and comes to us through them. Let us ask ourselves—Who is he in all the world who does most for us? Think of the great world with all its roar and traffic and eager crowd ; think of all the interests that busy and concern men. There are the thinkers who think, and the artists who bless us with beauty, and the poets who sing. There are those who enrich us with the luxuries of life, and those who toil for its comfort and necessities. But who does most for us? He does most who brings to the heart a new accession of love,—of love that subdues all the thought and aim of the life :—who uplifts its little common round into a thing purged of its selfishness and made beautiful by thought of others. If that be so then let the world make room for the apostle of love,—the little child.

Read with me that glowing eulogy of love which St. Paul has spoken. *Love suffereth long and is kind, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, suffereth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; love never faileth.*

What think you of that? Is it all a sublime ideal, too noble for the selfishness and greed of men, or not? If it be possible, what process, what watchfulness, what stern discipline, alone shall attain it? And shall not the very discipline and self-restraint make one hard and suspicious?

But come and see the mother as the babe lies in her arms. Here it is, all living, to the very letter. "Love suffereth long and is kind; love beareth all things, endureth all things, hopeth all things; love never faileth." In a thousand things every day men reach the limits of their knowledge; and tongues sooner or later must cease, but that love of the mother is like God,—it is infinite, without measure and without end.

And lastly, let us learn that it is only the child spirit that can know God. We read that on one occasion Jesus rejoiced greatly, and said, "I thank Thee, Heavenly Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes,"—words that have been horribly misunderstood with almost a malicious ingenuity, as if the splendid gifts of in-

tellect and beauty were things not of God but of the devil, and all that brightens and beautifies our life with lofty thought and heart must be set aside as useless. No, these are of God, His high and holy gifts to men. It is not to the capacity that the words refer, but to the *relationship*.

Come away to this house where lives a man of whom all the world has heard though nobody knows his name. He moves amidst the servants. Ask them if they know him, and they will tell you in a moment that they have worked for him all their days. Yes, they know him, his skill in dealing with the fields, his management of the cattle, his kindness to the servants,—they know him well. Here come two of his friends, they know him too. They constantly see him and talk with him. They know his thoughts, his likes and dislikes, his reverence for the past, his hope for the future, his opinions on things to-day.

Yet they do not know him away in the innermost heart. But now there comes one day a limping, hungry, ragged prodigal, and “when he was yet a great way off his father saw him and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him,” and that great heart, beating with its fulness of love, welcomed and blessed the lad as he cried, “Father, I have sinned.”

And the father turned to the wondering servants, “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and the ring for the finger and the shoes for the feet,

and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry."

No, *they* did not know him, it was only the son, it was only that son who could know that father.

What hast thou said, "I can never know Him, all-wise and infinite, He is past finding out." Why, my very weakness affords the revelation of His tenderness, my want and helplessness are the opportunity of knowing Him as the strong and mighty can never do.

The angels may know the glorious majesty of God. They sweep through the universe exploring His greatness and wisdom, they come back and bow in rapturous devotion before Him veiling their faces, and crying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory."

And we, alas! so little and so far off, what can we know of Him? But lo, because we are weak and little, because we are sinful and unworthy, ours are revelations of Him that they can never know. It is as the Heavenly Father bends over us in tender pity that the angels see God in His fullest glory and they cry in wonder, "Herein is love."

A CALL TO COMMUNION

“Jesus saith unto them, Come and break your fast.”—*St. John* xxi. 12.

XII

A CALL TO COMMUNION

THE first thing and the great thing in this chapter is the revelation of Jesus Christ. So the story begins. "After these things Jesus *showed Himself again* to His disciples at the sea of Tiberias." The whole story is full of touches of exquisite tenderness. The golden thread running through it from beginning to end is this purpose that they should see Him and know Him indeed to be "*this same Jesus.*"

Look at the place. They had gone into Galilee where they had mostly lived with Jesus. Jerusalem was full of dark memories of His death. There was Gethsemane, where He had bowed in His exceeding sorrow. There was the Judgement Hall whither He had been led bound, and where He had been beaten and mocked. There was the palace of Pilate, where the Lord had been condemned, and there the palace of Herod, where He had been smitten. And there without the city wall was the place where He had been crucified.

There was the garden with the sepulchre in which He was laid. If they were henceforth only to treasure the hallowed memory of a dead Christ, if that was to be the service they should render, then Jerusalem was indeed the only fitting place for them. As they passed along its streets they met the Pharisee and Scribe who had compassed His death. There went the Roman soldiers who had crucified Him. Blessed was it to go forth from its gates and leave its darkened memories. As they returned to Galilee it was as if they entered into a new earth and walked under another heaven. Along these ways He had walked and talked with them in happy communion. There on the hillside was the sower going forth to sow. The very fowls of the air seemed to sing of Him. And on the slopes, decking them with their rich beauty, grew the lilies of the field breathing still the lessons He had taught them of the Heavenly Father's care.

Above all places they were by the sea of Galilee. It was set about with happy memories of their dear Lord. There was the strip of green grass on which the people sat when He had fed them. There was the spot whence He had come forth to them across the tossing waves. They could not lift their eyes without seeming to have the blessed Master beside them as of old. And note further, not the place only but the very *occasion* brought Him near. Of all the memories of their Lord in Galilee none was

more deeply graven, and here by the sea none was so often recalled as that night when the fishermen had gone forth under the still stars and had toiled through its stillness and had caught nothing. In the morning their boats were drawn up by the shore and these same fishermen were sitting beside their nets when Jesus came on His way. He bids them push off the boat and cast the net again. Peter, the fisherman, shakes his head doubtfully. It is no good;—if they failed at night there is no chance by day. Yet to oblige this Rabbi from Nazareth he is willing to let down the net. And lo! it is filled. Terrified with this show of authority the fishermen fell at His feet. Then came, gently spoken, the call to the new work, to which they were henceforth to devote their lives. “Fear not, I will make you fishers of men.”

Now once again Peter, whose voice has been silenced since that night in the Judgement Hall, speaks to those about him. “I go a fishing.” It may be that he, filled with the great sorrow of his fall, thinks that he can no more be trusted with that work to which the Master had called him. He has proved himself unworthy. For him, at any rate, there is nothing left but to go back again to the old calling. “I go a fishing.” Sadly the others answer, “We also go with thee.” We see them get into the weather-worn craft. There is Simon Peter, saddest of them all. There is Thomas, who surely can never

doubt his Lord again. There is Nathaniel. There are two others not named. There are the two sons of Zebedee, one of them ever listening and longing for the coming of the Lord. They toil all night and catch nothing. And now does Simon say, "Ah! do you remember, it was after such a night that He manifested Himself to us that first time?" And is it John who answers, "Perhaps He has sent such another night that we may learn to look for Him again"? So the hours go by. Each time they drag the dripping net only to find it empty. At last the day quivers over the hills of the Gaderene country, when suddenly from the misty morning comes a voice all tenderness, "My lads," for so is it best rendered, "My lads, have ye anything to eat?" They cry back, "We have toiled all night and have caught nothing." Then comes the reply, "Cast your net on the right side of the ship and ye shall find." And every one felt in his heart that which John said, "*It is the Lord.*"

Look back over it all and see how all is ordered for this one end—that Jesus shall show Himself to His disciples. He Who was dead and was risen, He Who came they knew not how or whence, and went they knew not whither, must have seemed as another to them, a mysterious presence to Whom they could not come as they came of old, with Whom they could not enter into happy communion. And just as Thomas must have his faith assured by touching

the wound-prints and thrusting his hands into that sacred side, so now, by all the surroundings, by the place, by the occasion, by all the former memories, the Lord would reveal Himself to His disciples *as this same Jesus*.

This is ever first, and without this there is nothing. There must be the real Presence or there is nothing, nothing. Not a real presence in any awful mystery of bread and wine,—that surely is unlike all that we know of the blessed Saviour. But we must know Him as our very Friend and Brother, as they knew Him of old. So He longs to reveal Himself, making our hearts burn within us whilst He talks with us by the way. “Where Christ is there is the Church,” said the great divine of old. Where Christ is, there, and there only, is the sacrament. Let us think again how the Lord Jesus seeks to manifest Himself to us by all the faculties of our mind, through all the avenues of the soul, by all the circumstances and conditions of the daily life, by all the promises of His word and the services of His house and the influences of His Spirit. Let us, like John of old, listen and long for Him with a listening and longing that are never in vain; and lo! He shall come to us as He came to those, so that the heart shall cry, “It is the Lord.” Then, and then only, can He bid us come and break our fast.

The second thought is *the renewal of love*. It is in Peter that the story centres now. Here is the

fire of coals. That to him may mean much. The only other occasion on which we read of a fire of coals is in the Judgement Hall, where Peter had stood and warmed himself, but alas, where the chilled heart forgot its Lord and false tongue denied Him. And now here is another fire of coals,—the drift-wood which the gracious Lord has stooped to gather with His own hands and has kindled for His wet and weary disciples. Look at the group. There is the sandy shore, from which the steep slopes rise, gay with a thousand flowers. Before them stretch the blue waters of the lake. On the shore sits the Saviour. Beside Him is John, and the other side, we can think, is vacant. Peter cannot go to his old place, and none else would fill it. He is stretched full length at the Master's feet and is thinking how he longs that he could tell the Lord that he does love Him. But alas! after that dreadful fall, he dare not trust himself to speak again. Now the face of Jesus is turned toward Simon, those eyes look on him, reading his heart. The hand is stretched forth and laid upon the shoulder. "Simon, son of Jonas, dost thou care for Me?" It is not the word that Peter uses. "Dost thou care for Me!" Instantly Peter with heart on fire, cries, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest *that I love Thee.*"

Again Jesus asks him, "Simon, son of Jonas, dost thou care for Me?" Again he cries, more

passionately, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I *love* Thee." The third time Jesus yields to Peter and uses his own word, "Dost thou love Me?" "Love Thee, my Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Why, think you, is the question asked three times? The answer is not far to seek. Because by that fire of coals in the Judgement Hall three times did Peter declare "I never knew Him"; and now three times should Peter look into that face and declare "Thou knowest that I love Thee." For every one of us this is the next thing. Here in our midst is the Lord Jesus Christ Who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and from His lips He speaks to us each by name. There comes the question, "Dost thou love Me?" He waits for the separate and personal reply. What is it? From many, it may be, there comes the answer, "Lord, I did once,"—and sadly it ends there. Here too the old place is empty. Like Peter, for greed, for ourselves, we may have forsaken Him. Or there came the hour of temptation, the sneer, the threat; and that dreadful denial, "I never knew Him." The Lord Jesus stands to-day as near to us as He was to Peter of old. For us there waits the fire that can warm the chilled heart into love again. For us there waits the food indeed that can nourish our faith and courage and devotion to our Lord. To us He saith, "Come and break your fast." Note well that it was *after* the meal,

not before, that the questions were asked. *When they had dined*, Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" The cure for my coldness is at His feet; the strength for my weakness is in His presence. It was when Peter saw those pierced hands and looked into His face, that his heart was filled with this great love.

The third thought is *the commission for service*. "Jesus saith unto him, Simon, tend My sheep, feed My lambs, shepherd My sheep." That is ever the third feature in Peter's restoration. Love can only satisfy itself in service. It cannot live in words only, it must clothe itself in deeds.

And yet again we can think that to Peter's great love it must have seemed as though henceforth any true service was impossible. Had not the Master Himself spoken the words that told that it was all too late? "*Sleep on now and take your rest.*" The great opportunity was lost and gone, never more to return, when in the hour of the Saviour's loneliness and agony Peter could have stood boldly by his Lord. The memory of what he might have done had made all the future empty, all possibility of service sink to nothingness. Ah! if only *then* he had followed closely by his Lord, had borne for Him the Cross, as did Simon the Cyrenian. And does Peter look up to his Lord with tearful eyes and say, "I would, my Lord, but it is all too late, too late,"

and is it as Jesus bends over him and reads the secret of his heart that He replies, "Nay, Simon, nay, love ever finds its opportunity. Fear not, thou shalt yet be Peter the Rock, upon whom I can build, thou shalt yet fulfil thine own words, and follow Me to the death. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shalt gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He signifying by what death he should glorify God."

Love will find its opportunity. As in the glad season of the spring time the sun cannot show itself without quickening in seed and root the glad new life, and as in turn the new life cannot but unfold itself in leaf and bloom and flower, so is it that we cannot see the Lord without a quickening love, and love can only live in fuller, richer service. And love and service in turn do bring the revelation of the Lord. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Amen.

THE TRUE BEAUTY

“Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.”—*Ps.* xc. 17.

XIII

THE TRUE BEAUTY

I

LET us dwell upon some of the more prominent features in any beauty of character.

We feel at once that there can only be beauty where there is *unity, consistency*. Alike in science or any thought, we cannot rest until we get down to the law that lies at the back and source of the subject. And in beauty there must be that which reaches to the innermost life, and thence stretches to every side of the character, and runs through every development of it. Beauty is a matter of proportion and harmony,—and what is that but another name for unity? This is the great mark of God's work,—that whilst with us beauty is often only the end and finish of our works, in nature beauty runs through all, and the minutest and most hidden part is as beautiful as the more manifest and developed. And yet even with us, who see but the

outside of things, that which is *only* outside offends as an imposture and pretence. We keep our bitterest scorn not for the bad man, but for the hypocrite, who assumes a beauty that does not belong to his innermost life,—a skin-deep covering for the false soul that hides beneath it. This must stand first: unity, consistency—in one word, *truth*.

The next feature in any beauty of character is *strength*. And what is that but the proof of consistency and unity—its proof and measure? Strong because one. Weakness of purpose, weakness of principle can never be beautiful. Strength that puts its foot down, and straightens its backbone, and knits its brows, and sets its teeth, and cries, like Luther, "Here I stand: I can no other. God help me"—obstinate if you will, stubborn if you like; but obstinate for the right, stubborn for the truth. The strength that can endure, that can die if need be, but that cannot yield. Strength that does not bluster, much less bully or boast; but that neither fears nor falters. A thing rooted and grounded in right.

Another feature in this beauty of character is *naturalness*. That which tries to be beautiful is at once undone. That which *must* be beautiful cannot. The self-consciousness ruins it. True beauty is made up of such strength and such simplicity that it is unconscious of effort. Real simplicity is simple reality. And this means freedom. And yet is it

the freedom of a compulsion which knows no choice, no conflict, no friction,—a compulsion which fills and floods the will, and finds a glad response in every faculty. You cannot get any beauty of character when there is the clank of the chain and the whip of the taskmaster, when the soul is torn between duty and pleasure. The stern "*thou shalt*" of the law must become softened, and yet strengthened into a joyous "*I will*" if the true beauty is to be ours.

And strength and naturalness bring *joy*, and bring *rest*. At harmony within itself, the soul has rest; at harmony with the great divine purpose of things, the life is filled with music. Joy is beauty, and beauty is joy.

See how perfectly all this meets us in the character of the Lord Jesus. In Him there is nothing that breaks the completeness, nothing that jars upon the perfect harmony. There is no false note. In Him there is strength. He saw along His way that dreadful end,—the shame and agony that awaited Him,—and yet He came on, step by step, and day by day, to meet it. What naturalness was His—how unconstrained. What ease. How spontaneous and free and perfect in its fitness to all occasions was that life. He was always ready for all kinds of characters, and all kinds of wants, because He was always Himself. What freedom was His. He who took

upon Him the form of a servant ; who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister ; who said, "I *must* work," yet, because all within Him was one and all was strong, what a perfect freedom was His. And His was a joy such as none other ever knew, anointed with the oil of joy above His fellows.

And, looking at Him, we see the beauty of the Lord our God in yet another aspect that completes it. We have said that beauty of character is joy. Yet where was ever such *grief* as in Him—the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief? This is the finish and perfection of any beauty : *Love,—great, deep, tender love*—that stoops to carry the sorrows of men ; that weeps with those that weep, and that makes the burdens and griefs of others its own, a deep yearning sympathy. The unity of beauty must become a oneness with others, and must hold itself and its all to help and bless those about it.

This then is the beauty of the Lord our God that is to be upon us : unity, strength, naturalness, freedom, joy—all gathered up in a life of simple love.

But between ourselves and this vision of beauty are many hindrances. There is our feebleness and helplessness. It is stamped upon us. Taken from the dust, to the dust we return. "Thou turnest man to destruction. Thou sayest, Come again, ye children of men." The reference seems to be to the Potter who has shaped the vessel, and then, as if wearied of

its flaws and defects, He shatters that which has so failed to fulfil His ideal. We dream of beauty, and lo, Time laughs at us, Death claims us, Eternity affrights us. Over us there falls that chill shadow, and for us there waits that gloomy home where there is no work nor device. We talk of strength, of freedom, of joy—and lo, we are but the froth and foam of the flood; a bubble on the wave; helpless creatures, the sport of cruel circumstance. We almost hear the mocking laughter of the soul at itself. Beauty! Alas for us! What beauty but that of the grass, which springs up at the dawn; and with the night there comes the frost, and it is cut down and withered? “We spend our years as a tale that is told,” stirred by some fancied triumph, and then back again to the emptiness.

Nor is that all. Would that it were! “*Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee: our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.*” In that fierce light, all hard and naked stands the evil of our lives. Talk of beauty, amidst all that is false and revolting and insulting! Shall *we* dare to think of the beauty of the Lord our God, for whom there can be but His fiery indignation? Unity,—alas, how are we rent and torn by the foul hands of our sins! Strength,—to-day, in our pride, we stand as a rock; and to-morrow, in our feebleness, we are swept as the dust. We dream of naturalness, freedom, joy,—and every good is such an effort, and every duty seems so hard! Beauty is

love ; and in our hearts ill-will, and selfishness, and all uncharity do find a home.

Yet within such a soul is born this prayer, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." This is the glory of this Book. It deals in stern hard truth with us men and women ; and yet it puts within our reach the highest and most sublime possessions that God can confer upon any.

How then is this prayer to be answered ? By a new life. From within, not from without, must come the beauty of the Lord our God. This unity and strength can only be of *life*. This naturalness can only come of a new nature. All God's beauty is from within. It is true of everything, as Tennyson sings—

To-day I saw the dragon-fly
Come from the wells where he did lie.

An inner impulse rent the veil
Of his old husk ; from head to tail
Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.

He dried his wings : like gauze they grew ;
Thro' crofts and pastures wet with dew,
A living flash of light he flew.

And to turn from poetry to homeliest prose. A while ago I held in my hand a strange sort of nut, a thing like a small cannon-ball—it might have been made of iron. "How do you crack it?" I asked. "Well," said the man, "you want a blacksmith's hammer to do it. The boys fling them against the

wall, and have to do it half a dozen times before they get them opened." As I looked at it, I thought there was a more excellent way than that. Plant it in the ground. Let it be quickened with new life from within. Let the gentle forces of sunshine and shower move upon it, and again the old husk should be rent. So is it that God begins to make us beautiful, by the power of a new life.

Again we remember this word, the *pleasantness* of the Lord our God. Patience, gentleness, hope, are needful to the unfolding of this beauty. "He blesseth the springing thereof." Our Heavenly Father does not wait until things are finished before He cares for them. He stoops tenderly to bless the little hidden beginnings of things. The sprouting seed is cared for and ministered to. Soul, thou hast a God who can make the *beginnings* of thy new life beautiful.

Then there is the ministry of ten thousand influences and circumstances. How much goes to the making of a flower? There are the frosts that fray the soil; the winds, with every change bringing some new service; the soil itself, hiding forces that can quicken and upbuild the seed and its growth; the dew and rain; the sun and air. What wondrous power is this that thrusts out leaf, and shapes the bud, and unfolds the flower. What skill is this that paints its delicate colours. What subtle chemistry distils the scent. And for you and me, what? How *much more* shall

your Heavenly Father clothe you? *All things work together*,—here is unity in that which seemed so diverse. *All things*,—the circumstances that we thought so much against us; all things work together that *we be conformed to the image of His Son*. That is the beauty up to which all things are to lead us,—all the coarse round of daily life, all the busy toil, all the little passing touches and contact of the thousand things about us every day are to make us like unto Him who is the fairest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

What then have we to do? *Receive Him*. Open the door of the heart, and leave it open to the influences of heaven. Day by day surrender yourself with a brave trust to God, carrying ever this glad confidence, that only our highest, truest, fullest beauty can satisfy Him. If only the grace be ours rightly to hold ourselves towards all things, all things shall be the answer of this prayer, and the beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon us.

THE TRUE BEAUTY

“Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.”—*Ps.* xc. 17.

XIV
THE TRUE BEAUTY

II

“*LET the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.*”

Here is a prayer for beauty, and for the beauty of God. There can be no surer proof that we are created in the image and likeness of God than that we can dream such a dream, can wish such a wish, can pray such a prayer.

Let us see at the outset who is the man bold enough to send this great petition up to God. *The prayer of Moses, the man of God*, is the title which even the fierce criticism that has beaten upon the Psalms has spared us. We might think of it as the prayer of Moses, the prince of Egypt,—he who dwells amid the luxury and magnificence that kings do gather about themselves, where all wealth, and art, and splendour have enriched the place,—the prince and warrior, the poet and philosopher, the man mighty in deeds and words, dowered with beauty of face and figure, and having all that earth's proudest

ambition could ask ; yet outpassing all about him, his soul soars on the wings of a great desire, yearning for a deeper, higher, richer fulness—"Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." But not such an one is he who comes before us here. *Moses, the man of God*,—in the wilderness, worn out with the murmurings and wanderings of Israel, burdened with the cares of a people who are blind to all the purposes of God, perverse, faint-hearted, and grumbling. It is easy to think of such an one crying to God for strength, for rest, for patience. But from him at such a time comes the cry for the beauty of the Lord. Look well at it, for it is full of meaning—*God can give such lofty and sublime longings only to those who live a life of self-surrender and of service.* We must lose ourselves in the service of others in order to get the dream and desire for the beauty of God. Selfishness is blindness, deafness, dulness. It stretches hands greedy to grasp God's gifts ; it is driven by fear to seek His care, His forgiveness, His heaven. But the beauty of the Lord is only the longing of the soul that lives a life of love. The exceeding great reward of the soul that forgets itself in the care for others is not in earth's goods and glories, but in desires thus uplifted and emboldened.

Is it possible for us to find the history of this prayer in the life of Moses? A vision of God's beauty must have gone before this longing. And that vision had been given to him. Moses had taken

upon himself the sins of Israel and borne them before God with a petition awful in its daring and its utter self-devotion. "*If Thou wilt forgive their sin*"—then comes a pause. He would fain give himself a ransom for this people. "*If not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.*" With soul purged by so sublime an act, he looks forth upon the vision of all God's goodness. Is it then that his soul bursts forth with this entreaty, "*Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us?*"

This is the lesson of all beauty. The hard seed must give itself away before it is possible to make it beautiful. Think of the seeds, shapeless and useless, tied up in a packet of brown paper, carefully marked with a long Latin name. They may boast of safety, but certainly not of beauty. Listen to them: "How thankful we ought to be that we are not like so many others, our poor brothers and sisters, taken by rough hands, flung out into the dirty earth, dungeoned in the cold ground, buried under the snows, beaten upon by the rains, nipped by the frosts, blown about by the winds, and exposed to a thousand ills. Really we have a great deal to be thankful for,—to be wrapped up so carefully, and screened from so much evil." It almost frightens us to think how common that sort of congratulation is. It is what we seek as earth's best, and pray for as the proof of Heaven's favour. But it is only when the seed is flung out, and buried, that the dream of beauty stirs it. Do

not think that *anybody* can pray this prayer. The spoke of the ladder that you can put your foot upon depends how far up you have got. Beside this prayer of Moses, the man of God, we seem to hear the cry of Israel, "Thou hast brought us up into the wilderness to kill us. Give us the fleshpots of Egypt; the garlic and leeks and cucumbers." The life of selfishness cannot get above leeks and cucumbers. A prayer like this can only be learned by a life of loving service. It is not the dream of the poet. It is not the vision of the artist. It is the dream of loveliness that God gives *to the life of love*, just as the seed that gives itself to the earth finds itself in the flower.

Let those who would take this prayer and make it their own, *consider how God our Father must long to fulfil it, alike for His own sake and for ours*. For what after all is beauty, but that which has fulfilled the ideal of God? Beauty is the finished work on which God has set His sign-manual. He Who is perfect in all His works cannot rest until all is crowned and covered with beauty. It hurts and grieves our God when we delay or destroy the beauty that He seeks to bestow. Look at the blessed Master as He picks the flower of the field: "Solomon," saith He, "was not arrayed like one of these." Why not? If the Heavenly Father so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not *much more* clothe

you? *Much more.* Yet Solomon was not so clothed. Why? Because in the flower of the field there is the perfect surrender and response to the touch of God; there is nothing that hinders or diverts the purpose of God. Think of all the beauty of the world,—of tree and flower, the sunshine, and glory of the sky,—and set beside these things that which is sordid, coarse, selfish. Just as when the harper sweeps his fingers on the harp, and all the melody and rapture is spoiled by some broken string, some unresponsive chord, the unlovely things within us do break upon the beauty that God seeks.

And think again that this is the first thing that we are taught to pray for. “When ye pray say, Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come. *Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.*” Heaven is the perfection of beauty, because there is the perfect response to God’s will. Heaven is but His finished work, His realized ideal. “Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven” is but the New Testament form of the Old Testament prayer.

What is this beauty of God?

The word that is here rendered beauty has a meaning that we do not usually associate with it. Elsewhere this word is translated *pleasantness*. It is used to describe the paths of wisdom. It is the word that sets forth the friendship of Jonathan and

David,—they were pleasant in their lives. So we may read it, “Let the *pleasantness* of the Lord our God be upon us.” There is a beauty that awes; that marks off other things as poor and mean; a beauty that sets a great gulf between itself and others. And there is a beauty that gladdens, and delights, and sweetens. There is the beauty of the sun,—vast, sublime, quenching the light of the stars, filling all worlds, a glory too dazzling to be looked upon, a beauty that is blinding. And there is the beauty of the flower—buttercup or daisy; a thing so simple, finding its home in the common grass, lighting up some patch so as to gladden the heart of the city toiler, or to whisper sweet messages to some little sick child. This is the beauty that is prayed for here,—the beauty of the Lord our God is that which is simple, pleasant, lowly, sweet.

In this sense, how largely this prayer is already answered. As we think of it, everything seems full of His beauty. All nature declares it. The whole world illustrates it. What a sermon on beauty is every tree of the wood! Stand in the orchard and look at the black trunk, twisted and gnarled into curves of beauty. Follow the branches, peeping here and there amid the green leaves and dainty blossoms of pink and white. The shape, the colour, the play of light and shade—what a thing of beauty it is, to please and gladden. Then come again and gather the ripened fruit—what fairness of form, what rich-

ness of colour. And not only good for food, but *pleasant to the taste*, for in our very eating God cares about the pleasantness of things. And that every sense may be gratified, the very blossoms must be enriched with fragrance, and the tree becomes the home of birds, that they may gladden us with their sweet music.

Again, *What a world of pleasantness is it that God gives us in the relationships of life.* In the little children, with their tenderness and trust, are a thousand charms. What pleasantness is there in home and in all the blessedness of love ; in friendships that soothe and gladden life ; in the old age crowned with beauty. How much of the pleasantness of life comes from the freshness of things, the daily changes, the simple charms of common work. And how much there is in the healing balm of time ; in sunny hope ; in our power to sing and laugh, as well as in our power to work and pray. The pleasantness of the Lord our God is upon us.

Then again, *This prayer has been answered in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.* "He that hath seen Me," saith He, "hath seen the Father." And of that life, the beauty, the crown, the glory is its pleasantness. Men had dreams of the Most High as One amidst thunders and lightnings, from whom the people fled, crying, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die." And lo, there comes the little Babe of Bethlehem, the "Fear not" of God to the world,

That He may draw near to us, and draw us near to Him, He accepts all the conditions of our life, and bends toiling as the carpenter at the bench. He goes forth to preach, but does not startle with the cry, "Repent, repent." He sits upon the mountain-top, under the open heaven, without mystery or awe. He points to the flowers of the field and to the fowls of the air, and teaches men of the tender care of the Heavenly Father. How pleasantly He looked is seen as the little children come trooping up to Him and gather at His feet. Listen as He stands and cries, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." Pleasantness is the keynote of His religion. He tells His disciples not to have long faces, like the Pharisees. They are not to look melancholy, but are to let *their light shine*. "Be of good cheer" is the constant watchword upon His lips. The first sermon He preaches is on the text, "Do not fret or fear." Never was there one who so loathed and hated sin, and yet He looked and spoke so pleasantly that the publicans and sinners were always drawing near to hear Him, and the outcast found in Him a refuge and strength. Never did any preach such wonderful truths, and yet the common people heard Him gladly. Pleasantness finds in Him its perfection. He was always busy, and sometimes had no leisure so much as to eat; and

yet nobody ever came to Him to be sent away, or to be told to call again, or to be hastily dealt with. There was always room for the poorest to get at Him ; and the neediest could find all that they longed for.

Do you turn away from this and say that sin is deep and terrible, that it needs a treatment more severe than this generous diet ? Well, look at Christ in His treatment of sin. His own disciples have agreed to refer to Him their miserable dispute as to which of them should be the greatest. How does He settle it ? What an opportunity it afforded Him for severely reproving them,—for pointing out the miseries of ambition and the perils of strife. He might have warned them of the results of such a spirit on the interests of His kingdom, that nothing could more certainly hinder and oppose it. Look at them grouped about Him. There is Peter, with parted lips and eyes ablaze, and his partisans are ranged at his side. There is John, the son of thunder, on the other side, and those of his party about him. There is Judas, doubtful, ready to side with the successful leader. And sitting in the midst is Jesus. He lifts His face and beckons with a smile a little lad, calling him by name. There stood the little fellow by the side of the gracious Lord. And He laid His hand upon the child, the little face turned wonderingly upward : “ Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

How startling it is to read those words amidst the stern utterances of Isaiah, when he has thundered against the sins of the people—"Come now, let us *reason together*, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." God never breaks men's will. Break the will indeed ! You might as well break a man's leg to teach him to walk. How much of the man is left when you have broken the will ? Well does George Eliot say, " The first requirement of any soul to be good is *love* ; the second is *reverence*."

THE VISION OF ISAIAH

“Whom shall I send? or who will go for us?”—*Isa.* vi. 8.

XV

THE VISION OF ISAIAH

LET us set before us the story of the vision. *In the year that king Uzziah died.* Of all the kings of Israel none had done so much for the nation as king Uzziah, save only David. Solomon's greatness was largely inherited. He certainly stands a figure more splendid than Uzziah, but not of as great service. Coming to the throne when a lad of sixteen, for more than fifty years Uzziah reigned in Jerusalem wisely and well. Under the guidance of one Zechariah, of whom all we know is this, that he "had understanding in the vision of God," the youth Uzziah sought the Lord, and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. He drove back the Philistines and many another tribe that had encroached upon Israel's domain, so that his name was spread abroad even to Egypt. At home he was always busy seeing after the welfare of his people. He strengthened Jerusalem with fortified towers, and

set up towers for the protection of those in the pastures and plains. Careful about the water supply, he digged many wells. He had husbandmen busied with cattle : and planted vines on the mountain slopes. "He loved husbandry," we read, an honest and healthy love that it were well if we could all encourage and exercise. He turned to account the inventions of cunning men. Altogether a man whose name spread far abroad, associated with all that was beneficent and prosperous: "he was marvellously helped," we are told, "till he was strong."

*But—*ah, there comes this black and dreadful but—*But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction.* There came a day—probably some day of high festival, when he made a feast to his lords and chief captains ; and the power of the wine and the power of a yet more intoxicating flattery prompted him to a deed that was his ruin. Arrayed in all his splendour the king comes to the temple and demands in his haughty pride to usurp the authority of the priest, and to burn incense on the altar. The priests, those of them that were valiant men, rose up and stayed the intruder, king though he was. For a moment Uzziah stood face to face with the priests, the golden censer in his hand, he furious at their opposition. Would they lift their hand against the king and such a king as he? Then suddenly the rage resulted, as it is believed to have

done in other cases, in the manifestation of leprosy. Suddenly on that face, flushed in its anger, under the royal crown, spread the ghastly whiteness. He felt that God had smitten him. A king no more ; one from whom all men shrank—he went forth from the palace and throne and court. And all the nation spake of him with bated breath, suppressing the very name—“*He is a leper.*”

In the year that king Uzziah died. Solemnly as it must have impressed all, yet we can think that there was one to whom it meant more than to any other in the land. It was the young prophet Isaiah. Loving ardently as he did the welfare of his nation, seeing things with all the glow and glory of a seer and poet, his soul filled with the fire of enthusiasm in its first love, we can think of him stirred to admiration, almost to adoration by all that this Uzziah had done for Israel. Then comes the terrible ending of it all—overwhelming him. King Uzziah is dead, and who is there to take his place ? Who so many-sided ? Who so brave in battle, so skilful in understanding the time ; the terror of his foes, the idol of his people ? All that greatness and glory ends in leprosy and death ! Such a man can sink suddenly from such a height to such a depth ! Is there then any hope for anybody ? Is there any good in anything ? Most of us know such seasons, and all the dark questionings they bring with them ; the horrid whispers that come out of that gloom. The effect is

like the effect of an earthquake when one is afraid to set foot on the uncertain earth, or to lay a hand on the uncertain rocks—everything reels to destruction.

And now it is that as to Moses in the desert, and as to Elijah under the juniper-tree, there comes to Isaiah the vision that transforms him.

I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up. The gloom suddenly gave place to a glory blinding with excess of light. What was Uzziah in all his greatness now as the Lord sat upon His throne *high and lifted up*? *Here* were the shifting scenes of human life—the shadows that come and go, the pageants that move to the silence and dust of the grave. *There high and lifted up*—above all time, above all change, was the Eternal. Uzziah the king, Uzziah the leper, Uzziah the corpse—to set the heart upon him was to be disappointed, deserted, desolate. *The Lord is King*—that is the centre of all things, the true home and refuge of the soul. Here is sure ground for our trust; here all the adoration of the soul finds fitting room and sphere, and worthy subject for its service and worship. And ranged in serried ranks around the Most High were the cherubim with veiled faces and veiled feet, bowing low in worship. And like the sound of many waters rolled their majestic song—"Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." Thus then with conceptions stretched to the infinite, above the bounds of Israel and of

earth itself, Isaiah sees that the true greatness and the true glory and the true strength cannot be in huge armies or conquered Philistines, not in wealth of sheep or oxen or terraced vineyards. All that is abiding, all that is worthy, all that is really glorious is in an utter surrender to the service of the most High God.

But now comes that which is surely the wonderful part of this vision. Amidst all this exceeding joy, what can be wanting? The Lord of hosts sits upon His throne,—He with Whom to speak is to do : to will is to create. Here are the angels that do excel in strength, hearkening to the voice of His word. Yet here it is that the Lord Himself asks, "*Whom shall I send ? and who will go for us ?*" And in the silence that follows, we might expect the cherubim to answer it. "Are we not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister?" Swift as the light, glorious as the sun, sinless as the heavens—are they not fitted perfectly for His service, and eager to do it? What is this want of God amidst His majesty and greatness? From earth and from us there must come the answer that alone can break that silence and meet that want—God, the glorious God of heaven amidst cherubim and seraphim waits for the reply from earth and from man—*Here am I, send me.*

Let us think of this deeply and earnestly, for it is a wonderful thing ; the question of God that

only man can answer—the want of heaven that only earth can meet. We may call it boldly — *the dependence of God upon human service*. That the question should come at all is a wonder, that it should come when it did was much more wonderful. The angels must have marvelled to hear such a word *in the year that king Uzziah died*. Whom shall I send? Had not God raised up this king and strengthened him and prospered him and made him great? And yet the very goodness of God and the greatness that He had given was made but to minister to a pride that overstepped all bounds. And the chosen and favoured king is smitten as a leper. And now is another of this evil race to be chosen? Will God trust yet another with the glory of His service and commission? So it is, and so it must be.

St. Paul uses the phrase—"The God of hope." It is a great title. With unfailing trust God turns yet again to seek a messenger for His service. Notwithstanding the long years of weary failure, of cruel selfishness and suffering and want,—old ills finding their resurrection with every new opportunity, notwithstanding the cruel forgetfulness of the Most High, the mad rebellion against Him, yet the God of hope asks, "Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?" And if we ask, what is the source and strength of this hope, we may find the answer. Have you noticed in the early history of man a trace

of sadness, almost a sense of failure? "It repented the Lord that He had made man, and it grieved Him at His heart." But do you see how the shadow melts away, and the tone grows ever more jubilant and hopeful until it reaches the rapturous outburst, "Glory to God in the highest ; peace on earth ; goodwill towards men." Then breaks out the enthusiasm of humanity, and all leads straight on and up to the splendour of His triumph and coronation. Is it not that ever amidst all the rebellion and degradation and failures of our humanity there stands before God the finished, perfect, proper man Christ Jesus? There is God's hope and satisfaction—the glorious token and promise of what our poor humanity can be. There is the Pattern Man, and every force in the world is set to this one end—that we be conformed to His image. The Man Christ Jesus is the hope of God—as He is our hope.

See how this dependence of God upon man runs through the Bible from end to end. The great promise that knits it in one living unity from Genesis to Revelation is the promise that "*the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*"—the seed of the woman. As by man came sin by man must come the world's redemption and deliverance. All the successive revelations of God have been made through men to men. Abraham and Moses, Elijah and Isaiah, the Apostles, and all the long line of emancipators of the people—reformers and prophets,

It is ever "*the seed of the woman*" that must bruise the serpent's head. The glorious Son of God, our adorable Redeemer, must be born the little Babe of Bethlehem, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, that He may be our Brother and Friend as well as our Saviour. He goes forth to His great work as the man filled with the Holy Ghost, the Son of Man, as He delighted to call Himself, qualified by that great gift, which is ours for the asking, to accomplish His great work. See how as He stands on the threshold of His ministry the tempter meets Him, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." At once there comes the answer, "It is written *man*." *Man*—thou comest against me as the Son of God, but I come against thee as one of My poor brethren, and avail myself only of the power that they may have. "It is written *man*."

And in the life of Jesus Christ nothing is more pathetic than His dependence upon the response of the human heart. "*He could there do no mighty work*" we read of Nazareth, "*could* do no mighty work because of their unbelief." That Almighty arm was stricken as if paralyzed; the words of authority died upon His lips. We hear Him sighing, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few." Then with what entreaty He turns to His disciples and says, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest." It

is as if the prayers of the people put Him into possession of His power: the prayers of the people afforded the opportunity of His enriching the Church.

And in those figures of closest union and intimacy with the Church there is this same great underlying truth of dependence upon us. Speaking of the vine and the branches He saith, "Abide in Me, for apart from Me, severed from Me, ye can do nothing." A truth indeed that we need ever to remember and to heed. But have you ever thought of the other side of the truth? The branch can do nothing without the root; *but the root can do nothing without the branch.* The hidden life is ours only in Christ; but Christ's life and light and love can only flow into the world through us.

There is the same truth in that word of the apostle Paul, "*the Church which is His Body.*" What is the body but the means by which the spirit communicates with the world? The heart of pity needs the life that translates it into love; the great thought needs the lips to utter it as truth and to let it shine in the life.

With the same unfailing confidence in those who had failed and forsaken Him, the Lord Jesus turns to His disciples after His resurrection. They have come asking Him, "Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" And lo, He sacredly lays the accomplishment of His great work

upon them. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me." In them and through them the kingdoms of the world are to be made kingdoms of our God and of His Christ."

This is the sublime appeal of the Most High God to us. And on our answer depends the very worth of life. We are not living rightly until we are right with God. The lower chambers of our being alone are occupied until then, the store-rooms and basements and cellars only. We stoop and creep. We do stand up in our full height only in the service of God. These three great gifts together make up the greatness and glory, the blessedness and beauty of life; the clear perception that sees Him as supreme: the opened ear that hears His voice; and then the swift and glad surrender that cries, "*Here am I, send me.*"

THE NEW WEAPON

“And he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain
David.”—2 *Sam.* xxi. 16.

XVI

THE NEW WEAPON

THE weapon is called a sword, but what it was is doubtful. The Revised Version calls it new armour, and has in the margin the word *staff*. The Septuagint calls it a *club*. The learned in such matters tell us that it is some rare and unknown implement of war, whose terror lay in the fact of its novelty,—something that David had never seen, and did not know how to meet. We may call it *something new*.

The Philistines were entrenched in the strong cities of the plain, and in order to attack them, the little band of Israelites had to go over the steep heights and rough places. So it was that David had gone down with his companions to battle with the enemy. But he was wearied with the long march, and faint with hunger, and worn out with battle. Then there came out against him the new champion of the Philistines, Ishbi-Benob. He has armed himself with his coat of mail, and taken his huge spear ;

and carrying with him this new and infallible something, he sees his opportunity. In all the assurance of victory he rushes upon David. But against him came Abishai, the brave comrade of the king, and smote the great Ishbi-Benob, and left him dead upon the battlefield, and bore away in triumph this new and terrible invention, and hung it up amongst the trophies which enriched the palace of the king. Such was the history of this new something,—this *anonymous weapon*.

We may find in the story a parable with many lessons. We see in it a picture not of the enemies of David only, but of Him who is David's Lord and ours. What trophies hang in the palace of our King, what triumphs from all lands! What edicts, and bulls, and plots, what invincible weapons have been shaped, what armadas have been fitted against our Lord the King! And yet He lives; and yet He reigns throned to-day in the hearts of His people, never more beloved, never mightier or more honoured, than at this hour.

It was a grand acknowledgment of the power of David that they had to get a new weapon with which to slay him. I see this great family of giants gathered in council. "It is no good," they say. "We must get something new. He is more than a match for us with the sword. And the spear avails us nothing. Who was a finer spearman than our brother Goliath, the champion of our ranks? And

yet this David, though but a stripling, smote him with sling and stone before ever our Goliath had him within reach,—smote him with a pebble, and cut off the champion's head with his own sword, and carried head and sword into the tent of Saul. We must find something new."

Then this Ishbi-Benob set to work, and at last he hit upon a weapon warranted to lay any man low. He went down to the smith, and shaped, and hammered, and sharpened it. He took it to the priests, and they wove about it their spells, and muttered over it their incantations, and declared it irresistible. But lo! Ishbi-Benob is slain, and his new weapon hangs with the rest.

Being girded with a new weapon. It is strange what a fascination there is in the new. I have no sympathy with those who are always bewailing "the good old times." My dear sir, the good *new* times, thank God, are a great deal better; and they are going to be a great deal better still. I am always very sorry for those poor folks who get that sort of crick in the neck which keeps them looking backward like Lot's wife. No; let the dead bury their dead. But whilst I do not sneer at the electric light because our fathers used tallow candles, yet, in my admiration of the new illumination, I am not going to try and do without the sun. Bring up the latest phases of unbelief, or misbelief, or no belief, and set them alongside that strength of faith, that sunny

peace, that blessed hope in which our fathers lived and died. What are you going to give us in place of that? Can anything new produce such an one as Jesus Christ? or inspire such love and endurance and goodness as millions have found in Him? No; the enemy of our Master has to be perpetually forging some new weapon against Him, but we do not fear the blustering giant. The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing, but the decree standeth sure, "*Yet have I set My King upon my holy hill.*" He must reign.

What to-day of the difficulties that were going of old to destroy the Word of God, and the power of His truth? Come back over the centuries and see these two monks, who shut the door carefully, and talk in whispered confidences:—

"What ails thee, my brother?" saith one.

The other answers sorrowfully, "A sickness that I fear hath no human remedy,—and I sometimes fear no other. Hitherto the Word of God hath been my stay and strength, but these recent discoveries have driven me to despair."

"How so?" saith his friend.

"Alas! they who know most of these things do tell us that *the world is round*. How, then, can there be any more any corners of the earth, such as this Book saith? And if the earth do indeed move around the sun, what becomes of the rising and setting of which the Lord speaks? And if

that goes, what can we keep? You see, my brother, how all the system of the earth crumbles under our feet."

We smile at the perplexity of those poor monks, and to us nothing seems more natural than that the blessed Lord should use the popular way of speaking of these things. But to them it was a weapon so new and terrible that they could find nothing desperate enough to destroy it. I have seen the great waves rise up and come arched and swelling against the craft, as if nothing could stand before them. But lo, they have broken about the bows, flung into spray, and have passed harmlessly away. And looking back at them, I have wondered that I ever feared. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever."

In the future are a thousand changes that must come, and that shall affect the whole fabric of society. But amidst all changes one thing is sure—*love is supreme, and shall be for ever.* There is no new weapon ever to be forged that shall conquer love. Love blunts and breaks the sword; Love laughs at the spear, she turns the weapons of war into the peaceful ploughshare, and bends the spear into the sickle that cuts the golden corn. THE SON OF GOD LOVED ME, AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME: there is the assurance of His triumph in that personal love for every man, and in that personal redemption.

In vain do men seek new weapons against Him. He *must* reign Who is the King of love: for love is invincible, and love is immortal.

Then I think we may find in the words *an application to our individual experience*. "He being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David." So it is that the enemy girds himself with the new and unknown. We stand, it may be, at the threshold of some great change, looking out into the unproved. And as we look into the darkness our fear shapes a thousand forms of ill. It is so easy to see giants when we are faint, and when it is dark enough. Anybody can laugh at *real* giants—great, clumsy, knock-kneed creatures, who find it hard work to keep themselves upright. It is the fancied giants that torture us: the giants of our fears that want so much killing, and have such a horrible habit of coming to life again. I think of the young man or young woman who has come up from some quiet country home to the great city. Here life is a thing so different that you tremble. A thousand new weapons are raised against you. There is the dreary loneliness that takes all the heart out of one sometimes, and always most dreary on Sundays. There are the temptations besetting one on every side, and the old restraints withdrawn. There is the scornful laughter of those who make a mock of goodness, and who fling their jest at those things which are to you most sacred. And like David you are faint, and wearied often

when this giant comes blustering, and thinks to slay you with his new weapon.

And not only to the young do these changes come—but to those who can less easily accommodate themselves to new conditions. The middle-aged or the old find themselves compelled to go out, not knowing whither they go. Some business perplexity or some domestic trouble has upset all the plans of their life. The faint heart mutters its fear. The enemy puts on his cruel boastfulness. "Ah, what wilt thou do in this new difficulty? How canst thou hope to get out of this new trouble? There is no help for thee now. There is none to deliver."

Or it is worse still. Some bitter story of wrong and anguish, that can scarcely be put into words, and that I fear to touch lest it should bruise the very wounds that I would bind. It hangs over one, dark, brooding, blotting out all the heavens, and filling all the future with its gloom. Verily, the enemy has girded himself with a new weapon, and threatens terribly.

Let us make haste to take to ourselves the comfort which the text affords. *But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured David, and smote the Philistine, and slew him.* Come, come, dear soul, these blustering giants are not to have it all their own way. Ishbi-Benob had a new weapon, but Zeruiah *had the old, and he needed no other.* The old was more than a match for the new. That trusty sword

of his was not to be changed, be the foeman what he may, and be the weapon never so terrible. The old armour avails : *The word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit.* Abishai succoured David : but for us there comes a greater than he. The Almighty is thy helper, and He saith, "*I will hold thee by thy right hand : fear not, I will help thee.*" Put the trembling hand in His. "We are more than conquerors through Him who loveth us." Come what may, let ills be heaped on ills, He is ours who can never fail us, the great Captain who never lost a battle yet. Listen, and let the heart be thrilled with new courage as He speaks : "All Power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth : and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Let us sing the glad reply. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *Thou, Thou* art with me : Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

THE STORY OF GIDEON

“The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.”—*Judges* vi. 12.

XVII

THE STORY OF GIDEON

THE MAN

THIS Gideon is a man somewhat overlooked, but worthy to be set alongside the foremost heroes of the Bible. Many a smaller man has had more honour than this hero, at once gentle and strong, cautious and brave, deeply troubled by the evil of the times, and yet not without a great laugh in his heart and a ready humour.

At the outset it may be needful for us to say a word or two about this Book of Judges, with its scenes of bloodshed, its heroes so strange a mixture of faith and fighting. Let us remember that it does not do for us to judge this period by our standard of to-day. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Ghost have lifted the world into a new atmosphere, into a new heaven and a new earth. We do not think of going underground amidst the rough granite rocks looking for the flowers and fruits

that belong to the more finished earth. We have no right to look back to those ages for the softened manners and humanities which the growth of the years has brought to us. Even at the beginning of this century there were things in the administration of justice that shock us of to-day. What we have to remember is that the nation of Israel was raised up and called of God to be amongst the nations of the earth what the judge is amongst men—the stern guardian of righteousness. It is worse than a heathen notion for us to imagine that God chose the people of Israel as His favourites and sent them to slay other nations, and to possess their lands. The great Father in heaven holds all alike dear to His heart. And as for Israel no nation ever suffered more for its sins than they did. They were to be the teachers of righteousness: and to execute righteousness when teaching could avail nothing. Nations like individuals may sink down to depths of abomination past all hope, past all help, filling the air with poison, degrading men and women beneath the level of the beasts. When nations are past mending the stern sentence is spoken that they be swept away. There is no help for it. It is not pity that would avert the penalty of such sin; it is only cruelty and folly. Justice is not opposed to love. Justice is ever the only attitude of love towards sin. So we read the commission of Israel to deal with the nations of Canaan, the cup of the Ammonites was now full.

The people of Israel, somewhat suddenly led into possession of cities and vineyards, grew self-indulgent, and began to mix with the heathen of the land and to worship their gods. They came under the fascination of their cruel and abominable idolatry. Thus forsaking God, they come to be forsaken of Him. And without Him they can do nothing.

Deborah had gone through the land recalling the people to the worship of the Most High, and for a while had moved them to His service. But once more they had settled down—content to dress the vineyard and reap the corn ; to count the increase of their herds and flocks ; and had forgotten the lofty life to which they had been called.

That is the temptation in every age. To prosper in this life is the great end. The business is the thing for which we live, and God Himself is asked only to stand by and prosper that. Position is more than brotherliness. Gold is more than godliness. Happiness is more than holiness. With it may go a religion of a kind that is but an offence and a pretence—a formal observance of worship, a half-hearted assent to the truth. No man's religion is worth anything unless it is a power in the life that shapes the purposes, and masters him ; that checks the thought of gain by the thought of the brother's advantage ; that compels love and truth and generous dealing ; that forbids a word which understates or overstates. Of this we may be always sure

—the life that does not need God in order to fulfil its ideal will soon do without Him.

And losing God, Israel lost their faith, their hope, their unity; that which they made their good had become their curse; their prosperity tempted the desert tribes to come in their hosts—hordes of wild Arabs mounted on fleet horses or camels, swarmed like locusts upon the fig trees and vineyards, upon the cornfields and pastures, destroying what they could not carry away. Down they swept under their fierce leaders Zebah and Zalmunna, the *Raven* and the *Wolf* as their names signified, and were resistless. Israel, enfeebled and disunited, could make no stand against them. Driven from their very houses, they had to creep for refuge to rocky caves and to burrow in the torrent gullies.

What a picture it is of their distress! “Israel was greatly impoverished,” we read. “And because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, . . . and the children of the East, . . . and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude.” Was ever a scene of such misery!

Then came the beginning of their deliverance,—*the people cried unto the Lord.* A cry amidst the

anguish that their own folly and sin had wrought. Well, if we wait until our prayers are perfect, we shall wait till we never need them. Only perfect men can offer perfect prayers; and perfect men have nothing to pray for. The cry was heard and answered. *God sent them a prophet.* It seemed a poor reply to an impoverished and oppressed people. We should have asked first for twenty legions of angels to deliver Israel from the greedy Midianites. But until men are ready to listen to God they are certainly not ready to obey. The cry to God must lead to a renewed faith in God, and a renewed surrender to Him, then and then only can come their deliverance. The prophet must precede the victory, or the people are neither ready to win nor fit to avail themselves of it. Once again, then, the people have come to God and listened to His voice. And now comes the next step.

The story takes us away to the rocky hillside, where amidst the terraced vineyards is a wine press. And there, hidden amidst the leafy trees, one is threshing out the wheat that he had saved from the Arab plunderers. A man handsome of stature and of noble countenance. We have a picture of the man as well as a key to his thoughts when some time afterward Gideon stood face to face with the Arab chiefs—the *Raven* and the *Wolf*. "What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?" he asked. And they said, "As thou art, so were

they; each one resembled the children of a king." And Gideon said, "They were my brothers, even the sons of my mother."

Such is the man who bends threshing the corn: his heart thinking mournfully of the sorrows that have befallen Israel, and he wishing it were but the enemies of his nation that he smote thus lustily. Then he stops for a moment, and lifts himself from his work with a sigh. There beside him under the shadow of an old oak tree, sits a stranger watching him. Reading his thoughts the stranger saith, "The Lord be with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

The reply is not bitter or desperate, but utterly sad. There are tears in his voice as he answers, "Sir"—the word is one of courtesy and respect—"Sir, Oh Sir, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? It is my thought, my wonder, my longing day and night. Where are the wonders which our fathers told us of? But now, now," and the head is shaken, and the strong man bent, "now hath the Lord forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

Then the messenger looked upon the man—a look that awed and inspired him; that moved his soul, and girt him as with Divine authority,—a look that was the revelation of the Divine purpose and the enduement with power for its fulfilment. *"Go in this thy night, and thou shalt save Israel from the hands of the Midianites. Have not I sent thee?"*

Starting at the tone and words, Gideon wondered if the stranger knew what he said! Did he know the misery and poverty of Israel? Did he know the might of these fierce Arab hosts? And, above all, did he know this poor labourer to whom he talked? "I!" he gasped. "I am the least in my father's house; and my father's house is the least in the tribe of Manasseh. Wherewith shall I save Israel!"

And the word came as from the Lord, "*Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.*"

THE STORY OF GIDEON

“The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.”—*Judges* vi. 34.

XVIII

THE STORY OF GIDEON

ENDUED WITH THE SPIRIT

WE come now to the second chapter in this story of a great revival and a great deliverance.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. It is much more than "came"; the margin is "*clothed*,"—like a coat of mail it encompassed him with power. The idea is that it fitted and qualified him for the work he had to do. We all have lofty and sublime ideas, sometimes, like the stars. But the trouble is that we have got no wings to fly up to them. We all have a sense of the life we should live,—if we could. If will and power could act together, a single hour!

Fickle, feeble, afraid, forgetful often and indifferent, sometimes in very defiance and despair flinging ourselves away—think if we were exactly fitted and adapted to the duties and claims of the daily life,

without, on the one hand, an agony of effort, and, on the other, without the anguish of a constant failure. That is the very idea of the religion of the Book. The Lord Jesus Christ went forth to His work as the Man fitted and prepared perfectly by the Spirit of God for the work He had to do. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Him, and that was His power; to bear, to dare, to spread, to heal, He would not avail Himself of any power which was not within our reach. And is religion any good if it does not mean this? If there is one word that sums up the glory of nature and creation, I can think of none that does it so completely as the word *adaptation*, perfect adaptation, fitness—in every creature, the tiniest as well as the greatest, the perfect fitness to the surroundings, eye and ear and mouth and physical structure perfectly fitted to light and sound and food and life.

And now is there not somewhere that which can fit us perfectly to the highest and truest life of God? Is there to be in all things else the perfect adaptation, and here only all things awry? Is there to be a grim mockery within us, that grim laugh of hell, at all honest longings and better thoughts? Is there always to be a great black gap between the prayers and the life; the Sunday longings and the week-day ways? Are old sins never to be broken, and their tyranny never to be ended? Is this sense of God always to be a hard and unnatural thing

—a mountain very difficult to climb ; and when we get to the top, an air so rarefied that we faint? Is the life of religion a thing so exacting that only heroes and men of desperate courage and endurance can succeed? How good it is to turn to such a thought as this, *clothed with power*, fitted and qualified perfectly for the work the man has to do. It is exactly the boast of St. Paul—"I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me." It means literally that *I can prevail,—I can succeed*,—in all things through Christ which inspires strength into me. A perfect adaptation of the man to all that the Lord wanted of him. This is the only idea of Christian life which has anything to satisfy us. It is more than creed, more than forms, more than prayer ; these only minister to it. It is the power of God in a man, fitting him to do the will of God—just as perfectly as a bird is fitted to flight, or a man is fitted to think and speak. And mark too, it is not a power that is hard to get and hard to keep, so hard indeed that it is practically out of our reach. It is a power that comes to us in its perfect adaptation as the light comes to the eye, and the breath comes to the lungs. We have not to go up to heaven to find it. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and arrayed and equipped him perfectly for what he had to do.

And now what were the steps that led up to this? We must turn again to the story. It takes us away

to the hillside, where hidden in the vineyard Gideon threshes in the winpress the scanty store of wheat that he has saved from the Arab robbers. There came to him the angel of the Lord, whom as yet Gideon knows only as a courteous stranger. It speaks a great deal, a very great deal for the man—that bad as the times are—though those fierce desert tribes have left no sustenance for sheep, or ox, or ass, and though the people of Israel are driven to live in the caves of the mountains,—yet Gideon begs to be allowed to bring his present, as he calls it. He made ready a kid of the goats, and baked the cakes, and brought them in a basket with a pot of broth and set before the stranger under an oak. God never did anything in the world with a miser. The niggardly soul is not big enough for any of God's angels to come into. God loves the generous soul, the cheerful giver.

As long afterwards the Lord was made known to His disciples in the breaking of bread, so here was given some token of the Divine presence, before which Gideon fell down afraid and worshipped God. Then God spake to Gideon a word of graciousness and of peace. And Gideon built an altar there and called it Jehovah Shalom, "*The Lord send peace.*"

That is where the revival and deliverance began, and that is where it always must begin, in the revelation of God to the soul, and in the new surrender to

Him. There are many things that we should have looked for first. Close by the altar of Jehovah stood the altar of Baal and the grove beside it, the place of their foul idolatries; we might have expected first that it might be cleared. There is the roving Bedouin ruining the land; we might have looked that they should first be driven forth. But no, it must begin with God. *In the beginning, God.* That ushers in the Creation, and that precedes every new creation. Our fresh starts must first start in Him.

To find His presence, to hear His voice, that is ever the first thing. And the heart that listens and longs for Him shall surely hear Him.

Then comes the next step. Gideon must begin by demolishing the altar of Baal in his father's house. The Spirit of God has come upon him, not only to send him against Midian as the deliverer, but first against the hindrances in Israel that kept God from amongst them. He must throw down that altar, and he must cut down that grove. It is a dangerous work. Cautious as he always is, and as he need be, Gideon takes ten men with him by night, and a couple of his father's bullocks, and lo, as the morning dawned there was the altar of Baal thrown down, and the grove dishonoured, and an altar stood erected to the Lord of Hosts, on which the sacrifice was burning and the smoke went up to heaven.

Thus God taught Gideon what it was that kept

Him out of their midst. It was true as he mournfully complained, "If the Lord be with us, why have all these ills befallen us?" If God were with them should they not have such proofs of His presence as they had of old? Now God had forsaken them. But the fault was with them, not with Him. Gideon was at once bitter and mournful that God did nothing. But He could do nothing until the idolatrous altar was pulled down. Heaven's door has no bolt or bar on that side, but we put them up on this. No sooner is the altar of Baal gone than Gideon is sent forth to deliver Israel from Midian.

And now let us have the honesty of Gideon. Let us doubt our religion if there be in it nothing of the power of God. Is it not time to be tired of mere phrases, traditional notions, rounds of words that stop short of any actual force that makes for goodness, for truth, for purity, for love? "If the Lord be with us, why have these things befallen us?" Where are the tokens and proofs of His presence.

And if God be not with us the fault is not with Him. His love is ever eager to help us. He longs to fill our lives with His presence and power. Somewhere we may be quite sure there stands that which blocks the way, something that shuts the door against Him and bolts it.

It may be, and very often is, *neglect of prayer*, that which is the very opening of the door for His incoming. If we never listen to His voice, if there is

never any earnest waiting upon Him, then His very presence is but an absence so far as we are concerned. It may be that in *business* there is some questionable or unquestionable procedure, something perhaps that others call clever but that grieves God, as all that is selfish and unbrotherly must ever grieve Him. That is the altar of Baal. It must come down.

With another, it is some *indulgence*, or it may be some sin, the altar of Baal, set up side by side with the altar of Jehovah.

And yet, again, how often is it that the presence and power of God are driven out of the soul by some quarrel that has left its bitterness within. Love is the only atmosphere in which God can reveal Himself. Love alone has eyes to see God, and ears to hear Him. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. If the presence of God is not known to us, if God's power is not proved in our lives, if God's favour is not resting upon our work, let us be sure that somewhere there is a hindrance. And if we seek God simply and earnestly, He shall meet us and reveal Himself to us, and that vision of His presence shall be the strength to throw down the altar of Baal.

THE STORY OF GIDEON

“He put a trumpet in every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.”—*Judges* vii. 16.

XIX

THE STORY OF GIDEON

PITCHERS AND TRUMPETS

WE reach the third chapter in this story of a great deliverance. It is needful for us to recall that which we have already dwelt upon, and which leads up to our subject.

The robber hordes from the desert, wandering Arabs, had come up against the people of northern Palestine, like locusts for numbers, and like locusts for the desolation they left behind them. There was no sustenance for sheep or ox or ass. The frightened people hid in the caves of the mountains. Famine and misery were everywhere. Then it is that there comes before us this man, Gideon, a lowly labourer, thrashing out the scanty measure of wheat that he had saved from the robber hosts in the secrecy of the winepress. He carries in his heart the sorrows and sins of his people, it sweeps within his soul as a very flood of sorrows. That is the man for whom God is always looking, not the man who is eager about his own salvation, but who is willing rather to perish if

only thus he can uplift and deliver his people. That deep love is the first note of God's hero. The man who sighs and cries over the miseries and wrongs and griefs of the people, and makes them his own. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world because He took upon Himself our sins and griefs in an infinite pity and oneness with the whole race of man. And this it is which is the only Christianity, and the only Christlikeness—a deep yearning pity and longing for the truest welfare of the people. Every great revival, every great reformation, every great deliverance has begun there and *must*.

Now we reach the next step. He had to tear down the altar of Baal that stood at his door. The hindrances to that which God longs to do for men, are not in Him but in us. The things that shut God out are our own follies and sins. As soon as that altar of Baal is gone the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon. That is, there came upon him a divine fitness for the work he had to do. That is ever the next step. Christianity is not only a Christ-like compassion or infinite pity. It is a divine fitness for the life to which God calls us, a fitness in the man to fulfil God's plan and God's purpose. And let nobody wonder at this. "Thou preparest them corn when Thou hast so provided for it," sings the Psalmist. If God can fit the very clods of the ground by heavenly influences of sun and shower and changeful seasons to receive the seed and give

it back to us in the golden harvest, can He not, shall He not give to us men and women if we will let Him the grace that can fulfil in us the truest and highest and best? This is the meaning of His religion. Do not degrade its mighty meaning to anything less than that. It is a miserable thing to think of it only as a means of getting to heaven by and bye. It is a great, deep, living deliverance from the hell of selfishness, a restless and resistless longing to make something of a heaven for other people.

And now here we recommence our story. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. Look at him as he stands in the consciousness of his might. A little while ago he bent in his grief, sighing, "My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house," but now he stands the man of noble countenance and kingly stature, a very leader of men, he blew a trumpet, a blast of defiance to the hosts of Midian, and a summoning to Israel. And he sends messengers throughout the tribes, and speedily thirty-two thousand are gathered about the standard of Gideon. Did the man stay to wonder at it all? Nay, here was the explanation: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon."

No man knows what he is good for until he is given up to God. Did you ever think out of what a depth of feeling, what a force of experience come those words of St. Paul, "I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living

sacrifice unto God . . . that ye may prove what is His good, and perfect and acceptable will"? He sees himself, Saul the persecutor, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, his hand stained with the blood of the martyr Stephen, then he falls down before the Lord surrendered to Him and asks, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" And so he is transformed into the apostle Paul, gentle, yearning, with a Christlike compassion over men. We never know what God can get out of us until we are given up to Him. There is Luther, frightened into a monastery by a flash of lightning, and given up to God he becomes the fearless hero defying pope and devil. There is John Wesley, a rigid churchman, who goes forth to claim the whole world as his parish. It runs through everything. Your Father is the Husbandman, said the Lord Jesus. What is the seed, the little hard seed, dead, worthless, until it lets the husbandman have it, and he transforms it into the flower? The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and the sighing believer rises up the deliverer of Israel.

But we must turn to look at these whom Gideon has gathered about him. Here are thirty-two thousand men who have heard the trumpet, and have joined the ranks to fight for their altar and hearth, for wives and little ones. And now Gideon leads them forth in sight of the hosts of Midian. There stretched the tents far away, away, and every-

where the mighty host around. A shudder of fear, in face of such a multitude, went through the little company. Then rang out the usual proclamation: *What man is there that is faint-hearted and fearful? Let him go, and return unto his house.* At once timid men glanced at each other. Then one stepped out, then another, now by twos and threes they stepped back, then by twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, now by hundreds, the little army melted away until it seemed that there would be none left. Twenty-two thousand men went back.

What shall we say? "These are they which were sown on stony ground, such as hear the word and immediately they receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves." No root! Nothing to take hold of, nothing to take hold with, and endure but for a time. Who of us does not know them? It was delightful to hear the trumpet blown, delightful to hear that God had raised up this man Gideon, delightful to think of being delivered from these murderous thieves, until—until they got in sight of them. Then, well then, they thought *there was no place like home.* Ah! it is pleasant to sit and dream of the life we might live. We seem to catch something of its heroism and splendour by thinking about it. And to-morrow, what? We go back again contentedly to the old ways and the old life. We have heard the trumpet and swelled the numbers, and then, returned. We like reviews and parades, the only thing we don't like

is fighting. Well, let us own it with shame and humiliation ; we are not brave, alas, we are cowards ; most of all and worst of all we are cowards nowhere else but in the matter of our religion, faithful to all but God, ashamed of none but our glorious Captain and Saviour. How cruel and hideous a thing is this ! But abusing ourselves will not make us any braver. To be humiliated and ashamed is not a cure for cowardice. Is there any cure ? Well, come and see.

Here is another company that has failed in the hour of trial, and failed at the time when courage most of all was needed, and had its sublimest opportunity. To them the Lord Himself had turned, just as He was going out into the loneliness and terrors of the crucifixion, "To-night," said He, "ye shall all be scandalized because of Me." Of them in that hour we read, "they all forsook Him and fled." Simon Peter, foremost in asserting his devotion, thrice denies his Lord with oaths and curses. Yet of these it is spoken, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem" ; here where the enemies are so many and so mighty. But mark well that it is—*Power after the Holy Ghost has come upon them*. God does not choose men because they are heroes, but that He may make heroes of them. Not what we are, but what He can do with us, that it is of which we should think. The Spirit of power is

the Spirit of courage. The Spirit that came upon Gideon is ours for the asking. In spite of all the past, in spite of all the weakness and shame, take it and make it your prayer—"O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

But yet another test is needed. Gideon must have picked men for this service. Forward they march, the brave little band of ten thousand. If before they were heroes together such a handful against such a host, thrice heroes are they now to march forward where so many have fallen. All honour to these men whatever else they do. Remember the foe is in sight of them, stretched right across the valley, probably shouting their ribald defiance. The defence of Israel is a spring that rising up out of the limestone rock here forms a pool some twenty feet broad and flows in a stream down the valley. Soft banks and the deep river bed lay between the men of Israel and the hosts of Midian. The bushes and reeds that grew on the banks were just the place where the cunning Arab might lurk, and whence he could hurl his spear. What folly then was it, what sheer forgetfulness, for the host of these soldiers to search for a firm place where they could lie down with belt slackened and sword laid aside, and eyes turned altogether away from the enemy that they might drink deep. Now and then a soldier, wiser and more wary, stooped for a moment and scooped the water in his hand, and moistened his mouth with

the drops, the eye never off the foe, the hand never loosed from the sword. And Gideon marked these men and called them to him, and bade the others go back.

It was an admirable test. What he wanted for a night attack and surprise upon this host was not strength or skill, but men who could be trusted. Half a dozen careless men who bungled would spoil the whole thing. Men who knew what to do and exactly when to do it. This is what he wanted, and then could follow it up instantly to the best advantage.

Here, again, is the picture to the very life of the men whom God can use. Do not write those others down as cowards. Not at all. Their very carelessness may have indicated their courage. Do not think of them as mere self-indulgent good-for-nothings. Not at all. When the first blow is struck they shall come in to make the conquest more complete, and to chase the foe. But these of the chosen band are the men who must go first, men who put first and foremost the service of God, never slothful in business. Please do not think that I mean for one moment that a man is to be so heavenly-minded as to mind nothing else; that is to be a Pharisee and hypocrite. The man whom God wants is the man who is never off his guard; never so absorbed in business or pleasure as to lose sight of God's service, or needlessly to expose himself to

temptation. Of Noah it is written that being *wary* he builded an ark. The man who is wary is he who can sip where others gulp, and can stoop and scoop where others lie all-forgetful of the foe. It may be that thinking of this scene St. Peter writes, "Be sober," don't be thirsty. Be vigilant; keep your eye on the enemy.

The Arabs watching the company must have sent up a great laugh of derision, as they saw the army again fall off until only the three hundred were left. With an easy confidence they would anticipate the morrow when Israel should smart for having the impudence thus to protect themselves.

Now the day dies in the darkness. Gideon takes with him his brave attendant Phurah, and cautiously they creep near to the tents of the enemy. Here about the watchfire gather a group of swarthy warriors. And one uneasy soldier lifts himself and turns to a companion at his side. "Can you interpret dreams?" Gideon creeps nearer and listens. "What is it?" asks the comrade. "It was a strange dream. I saw a little cake of barley bread." "*Barley bread*," laughed the soldier. "Ah, that is Israel surely." For a cake of barley bread was a sign of poverty; a thing of contempt baked beneath the ashes, burned and black.

"Then if that is Israel," asked the soldier eagerly, "what does this mean? For the barley cake came rolling down the hills, like a thing blown by the wind,

and it came leaping until it rolled against the king's tent. And the barley cake smote it so that it lay along the ground. What does that mean?"

"Mean!" cried the other, "what can it mean but the sword of Gideon, a man of Israel? for into his hand hath God delivered Midian and all the host."

And as Gideon heard it he worshipped God, the head bent low before Him Who had thus strengthened His servant. Noiselessly as he had come he crept back to the little company, with a tone in his voice and a courage in his manner that inspired them all, "Arise," he whispered, "for the Lord hath delivered Midian into our hands."

The bold device had doubtless been already arranged. To each of the three hundred men was given a ram's horn to be carried in the right hand, and in the left each carried a rough earthenware pitcher, in which was hidden a lighted torch. Setting the men about the camp of Midian in three groups he bade them wait until he sounded the signal of attack: then instantly they should ring out one wild note on the rams' horns, and with a crash of the pitchers should wave the torches into a flame, and rush on the bewildered foe.

Now the moment comes. Silence rests on the hosts. Then suddenly rings the sound of Gideon's trumpet; never was bolder note more boldly blown. Quick as thought came the answer, as if a myriad

throats sent forth defiance to the tents of Midian. Then as if the heavens blazed, the glare of the torches flashed on every side. And there rang a shout, triumphant, terrible, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and Midian fled, every man in his panic smiting right and left, and trampling under or trampled upon. Swiftly down from the hills rushed the soldiers of Israel, and made the rout complete. It is written, "*All the host ran and shouted and fled.*"

THE STORY OF GIDEON

"Faint, yet pursuing."—*Judges* viii. 4.

XX

THE STORY OF GIDEON

FAINT, YET PURSUING

GIDEON has won his great victory over the robber hordes of the desert. Making the night hideous with their wild cries the terrified Arabs had fled down between the hills, leaving their tents and their camels and all the wealth they were accustomed to carry with them. Their chance of escape lay across the river Jordan and in the darkness they rushed thither.

But Gideon, a born general, had sent swift messengers to Ephraim to guard the fords, and as the day broke they found the men of Ephraim posted and ready to keep the narrow passage, and here a second victory was won, and here fell two of the chieftains "Oreb and Zeeb"—the Raven and the Wolf as their names mean. But the kings of these hosts, Zebah and Zalmunna, have made good their escape. Gideon and his brave three hundred must complete the conquest by their capture. Jordan was the natural barrier of Palestine, but a portion of Gideon's

tribe dwelt on the other side, and for them there should be no safety so long as Zebah and Zalmunna lived. They were always most exposed and the first to suffer. So on the three hundred go, restless though so weary, eager although faint. They reach Succoth, but still push on to Penuel with its watch tower, a vain thing as it proved for safety. On into the land of the enemy until they come to the place where the kings are taken.

Gideon, a man of like passions with ourselves, remembers how that these two had slain his three brothers, "the sons of my mother," as he said, "each one like the child of a king." And in their death the victory is complete. Fierce and bloody work as all war must be, alas, yet if it has to be done it were well to be done bravely and resolutely, and once for all.

Now before we turn half indignant from these stories, wondering that they can find a place in this Book of God, let us put ourselves in the position of Israel. I am a hater of war, but—but, what if you and I could not so much as sow our corn in peace for robber bands that came in their thousands to destroy it? What if we could not live in our own homes and dared not call our lives our own? What if there were scarce a family but mourned a father or brother slain by these wretched hosts? I do not think the age would be so sickly and sentimental as to deny the name of hero to the man who became the deliverer of his people, or withhold its admiration,

almost its adoration, for the conqueror of these robber hordes.

This victory of Gideon was the greatest success perhaps ever won by Israel, one of the most splendid victories of the world. Three hundred men against one hundred and thirty thousand trained and skilful warriors. The memory of it lived vividly long ages after amongst the people. The spring and the rock and the winepress keep the names of those that made them famous to this day. The Psalmist long afterwards recalls the fall of Oreb and Zeeb, of Zebah and Zalmunna, and his reference suggests that their attacks upon Israel were inspired by the fierceness of a religious hatred. They said, "Come let us take possession of the pastures of God." And when Isaiah in his stately imagery sees the rod of Israel's oppression broken, it is with a deliverance glorious and complete "as in the day of Midian."

It was when Gideon came to Jordan after that night's work, that we read those words of him, and his brave men, "*Faint, yet pursuing.*"

"*Faint, yet pursuing.*" The words have come to be a kind of saying to describe the religious life. Well, let us remember their origin. Nobody is allowed to use the royal arms without permission, and nobody but privileged persons ought to be allowed to use these words. Spoken at first of such heroes, it is a shame for laggards and cowards to take them.

[The virtue of the words lies not in the warriors being "faint," but that though faint they still went on pursuing.)

It is a great deal better to be strong than to be faint, every way better. It is good to see the strong man in his freshness ready for the race, bent, eager, waiting, watchful, ready to spring like an arrow from the bow. But there is one thing that we praise more than that. It is when away at the end of the course, we see the man, faint, gasping, dazed, with head bent and breath spent, pushing on. That is the picture. The will is fixed, the purpose steady. There is the pluck, as we Englishmen love to call it, the dogged tenacity that holds on; of all qualities that which is dearest to us, as it is the secret of our position in the world.

We turn the whole thing upside down, when we talk as if the virtue lay in the fainting, not in the pursuing. There is, or at any rate there used to be a melancholy sentimentalism of this sort, both in the Church and the world. It was *genteel*, the word is dying if not dead, to be pale, delicate, languid, given to fainting. It was rude to have thoroughly good health.

And in religion it was a sign of grace to be "a poor, weak creature," or to *say* you were. I have met with some people whose greatest comfort in life was to treasure their ailments and to describe them, either bodily or religious, sometimes both. There is such a

thing as *enjoying* very bad health. Such people love to find a text like this, and assure you that they are faint—faint, and they linger over it as a sweet morsel. “*Faint*,” that is the word that has all the emphasis, “*but pursuing*,” just comes in to round off the sentence.

Now, in the name of all that has to do with God or man, let us get rid of that. There is no virtue in faintness. There are a score of commandments telling us not to faint.

“Faint, yet pursuing,” may mean only our own condemnation. Faint, indeed! It were a wonder if one were not, when the word is never read, when prayer is neglected, when there is never any regular settled meal, mere snatches now and then at the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.

This faintness is a privilege that can only be allowed to those who earn it, those who have a good reason for being faint, and going on in spite of it.

Having thus cleared my way, now then let me speak as tenderly and graciously as I can to those who are tired, for that is what it means, a word in season for the tired people, tired without any thought of giving in, “faint, yet pursuing.”

I said just now that there is no virtue in faintness, no virtue in being tired. Well, I am not so sure after all. This was a grand faintness of Gideon’s, and the men with him. To have kept at it as long as they did, from the middle watch of the night and all

through that morning, pursuing the enemy right away for miles, and then to push on again. Yes, there was a kind of glory in this faintness. It was a noble weariness. It is better, ten thousand times better, to be faint in doing good than to be fresh in doing nothing. }

{ But virtue in it or no, this is what we have to remember, that it is *quite natural to be faint*—to be weary and tired. You cannot keep on at anything without getting tired. Only God is He Who fainteth not, neither is He weary.” So then, tired soul, do not cry out against yourself. See how graciously God deals with His tired children. If the day dawns in its freshness for the strong man who goes forth to labour, remember how God’s own gracious Hand draws the curtain of night about us, and He tenderly bids His tired child lie down and go to sleep. He knows how the tired need to be spoken to. Listen to the exquisite words of Isaiah, “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned.” What for? To argue with the wise, to convince the philosophers, to utter words of eloquence? No! “That I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” I have seen the mother when, after some day of excitement, the little one has been peevish, fretful, ready to rebel—“Poor little one,” says the mother, “you are tired.” And the tender tones have soothed, and soon the child has nestled asleep in the cosy comfort of the mother’s bosom.

God knows how to speak to His tired children. Look at Elijah, the fierce prophet of fire, lying under the juniper tree, peevish and fretful. And God sent an angel to bake him a cake, and bring him a cruse of water, and speak tenderly to him. "Why you are quite spent, you know, really worn out. The way has been too far. You are overdone. Eat this." And then like a tender nurse, which is another name for angel, she—I am quite sure of the sex—said, "Now lie down and go to sleep again." And, then when it was time, that heavenly nurse woke him up once more, "Now, you must take this, you know." And the stern Elijah was as obedient as a little child, as we men always are to these most amiable and blessed despots ; and he went to sleep again.

So then, tired and faint one, do not think it a wicked sign of weakness that you are tired. Do not hurl at yourself hard words that your senses are dull, your heart heavy, your energies flagging, that your thoughts wander. Do not be angry at yourself that you sleep under the sermon, blame the preacher for that, in my case at any rate. It is just natural to be faint and tired.

Nothing in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ brings Him so near to me in the reality of His human nature as when He was utterly spent and tired, asleep on the deck of the ship. And the tenderest words that ever fell upon this earth are those with which He calls the weary ones to Himself, "*Come unto Me,*

all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

And now we may venture to think of some of the reasons of this weariness.

Because of the way. It is sometimes such a long, long way, the monotony of life, its commonness, our ideals are so lofty, our dreams and visions so splendid, and we seem always so far away from them. Life is going on for ever and ever and yet getting no further, *pursuing, yet never overtaking*, that is the great source of faintness.

Do let us remember that we cannot measure ourselves by ourselves. We were children, once little babies, very helpless and ignorant. It is a long way back perhaps, yet we came on from that to where we are now without any sudden jerks. We ate and drank and slept and kept on eating and drinking three or four times a day, and sleeping every night, and we came to be the man or woman. I think I remember when I mastered "twice two" and almost fainted with horror at "twelve times." But we have come on, pushing forward a little bit day after day. Now, let us be quite sure that if we do every day just set ourselves simply to serve God, to live as His children and servants, doing the right thing, crushing down the evil and clinging to the good, that it assuredly means growth, a development, a getting further on and higher up, step by step, nearer to the divine ideal. There are no milestones on the way to

heaven by which you can tell how far you have come, or how far you must go. But being in the right road, you do know where it goes to. Pluck up a brave spirit : "*Tired I may be, but I will just keep right on.*"

Then the fierceness of the fight had worn them out. For hours every moment had been a strain and excitement, always on the alert, something to be guarded against, some advantage to be turned to account, pushing on without a moment's rest, fierce and desperate. Well, you pity them. The rest of the labouring man is sweet, but sweeter still is the weariness of the conquering soldier. It is the measure of his victory. Blessed, wrote somebody, be drudgery. Blessed, we may say, blessed is weariness. Away behind the hills were thousands who had enjoyed a good night's rest, and risen perhaps to find a comfortable breakfast picked up in the camp of the Midianites. Which would you rather be, one of the three hundred, "faint, yet pursuing," or one of these faint-hearted ones who had never pursued at all ! Do you sigh that your life is a thing of such strife and strain, of conflict, of desperate and incessant effort, of unwearied watchfulness ? But is not that the chance of victory ? Is it not the condition and opportunity of conquering ? Yours is the place which God's heroes covet, the stuff of which heaven's songs are made is there. "To him that *overcometh* will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." There can be no overcoming in any-

thing without effort, there can be no continued effort without weariness.

Yet it may well be that to not a few my words bring no comfort. "My weariness is so commonplace, it would be worth something if it were heroic and sublime, like that of Gideon's and his followers." Yet theirs was common enough, too, the want of a night's rest, and the want of a breakfast, that was the commonplace side of it, the common daily wants and worries, common perplexities, fears and frettings about things that it is scarcely worth putting into words, nameless tiredness of body, jadedness that drags down all the energy within us. But think, was it not of such common things that Jesus Christ talked in the great Sermon on the Mount, and is it not of them that He saith, "Your heavenly Father careth for you."

As we close the story let us think how very much there is to send us on our way with a new spirit and a new hope. Everything is for us. Well may we cry as girt with great resoluteness, "*Faint, yet pursuing.*"

Take two or three texts and turn to them for your own meditation. Turn to Deuteronomy ii. 17, "*He knoweth thy walking through this great and terrible wilderness.*" "He knoweth," it means more than that, He considers tenderly and sees to thy walking. It is a blessed way when God *watches* ; it is a right way when God *guides* ; it is a safe way when God

protects. Listen again to these lofty words of Isaiah, "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles.*" It is good to fly like the lark, but to mount up with wings as eagles! "They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Let God come into the life, and this is ours. It is the majesty of strength to fly like an eagle; it is a fresh, young, elastic energy, to run and not be weary. But sweetest and best of all, it is easy and glad walking when we go hand in hand with Him.

Listen to the words in the twelfth of Hebrews, and the third verse, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." The blessed brotherliness of Jesus Christ, the sweet and gracious sympathy, that constraining love is an unfailing spring of energy.

And, lastly, think of that name by which the Lord Jesus teaches us of the Holy Spirit. He who comes to reveal the *Father*, He who is Himself our Brother. He to His sorrowing disciples pledges the gift of the *Comforter*. Have you ever broken the word up? Co-fort: To strengthen by company.

THE DAILY BREAD

"Give us this day our daily bread."—*St. Matt.* vi. 11.

XXI

THE DAILY BREAD

THESE words teach us the true idea of prayer. It is first of all asking God for the supply of our needs. "Our Father which art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread"—means what it says. We are to come to God and ask for the supply of our commonest wants. Prayer is not to be so sublime that it forgets that we are men and women, having bodies as well as souls—bodies which God cares for and which He would have us care for too. But prayer is not only asking God for things. It is more, much more than that. *It is the process by which we are put into the right relation towards all about us.* "Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven"—these words do set us in the right attitude and relation to God. Then comes the next petition, *Give us this day our daily bread*—thus we are set in the right relation towards God's gifts.

There is much need to dwell upon this, for religion

is but life in its relation to all. Dirt has been wisely called "good matter in the wrong place." So sin is but the ill-use of good things. Every creature of God is in itself good, but we make it evil by wrongful possession or by wrongful use. Mercies are not mercies but curses if we put them in the wrong place. And there is only one way in which we can put the world in its right place, and that is by putting God in His right place. Have you noticed that the angels in Jacob's vision first ascended and then descended? At first the order seems unnatural. Are they not ever in His presence, hearkening unto the voice of His word? But as we look at it we see that this is ever the right order for them as for us. They must ascend if they would rightly descend. We must go up to God if we would rightly come down to earth.

Now, in this matter of the daily bread there are four ways in which men may get wrong—*negligence, anxiety, pride, greed*—and from each of these this prayer, if rightly offered, will deliver us.

There may be negligence in getting the daily bread. I do not know that this is an evil from which men greatly suffer in these times. Where indolence slays one over-eagerness slays a hundred. Yet so long as human nature is what it is, this disease of the bones—*laziness*—will never be quite done away with. It has sometimes been brought as a charge against religion that it is apt to make men so absorbed in the other world that they are unfitted for their work in this.

There may be a possibility of such a thing. But notice how these words deliver us. "Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven." Was any sublimer utterance ever put into the lips of man? They reach to the loftiest height; they go out over all the ages, touching all the forces of the world. They sink down deep into the oppressions and miseries of the world. They concern all the vast interests of the age—social, political, intellectual, religious. Now in the presence of these sublimities it seems an impertinence to think of our commonplace affairs—the breakfast, the dinner, the business. But this is the next petition. *Give us this day our daily bread.* We rise up to the Almighty Father, and lo! He comes down with us and teaches us that this is the very purpose of the daily bread. It is given that His name may be hallowed, that His kingdom may come, that His will may be done. It is through the daily bread that these great petitions are to be fulfilled. The man who is so taken up in the things of heaven that he forgets his duty down here on earth is a hindrance to the coming of God's kingdom. He who is so eager about the next world that he is slipshod in his business, not exact in his doings, who is at his prayers when he should be in his workshop, is a stumbling block to everybody. There is nothing secular now since the daily bread

is sacred alike by its origin and by the purpose for which it is given. We are to do our business so as to glorify our Father who is in heaven. We are to get our daily bread so as to hallow His name.

The corn itself is a parable on this matter. The daily bread is a product of two worlds—the happy combination of heaven and earth. Think if the corn should say—this earth is low and coarse and I must have as little to do with it as possible. It is for me to stretch into the heavens—I must be nourished by nothing less than the sunshine and the dew. Nay, heaven is needful to its growth—golden sunshine and soft shower—but so are the dull clods. It must take root downward or it will never stretch its head upward. Unless we do learn to deal rightly with earth we shall never know how to deal rightly with heaven. Do not climb up out of the world on Sunday as into some holy atmosphere, and then go sighing on Monday that the dreary drudgery has come again. Earth is quite as needful to us as heaven. We need the work of the world—its difficulties, its temptations, its discipline. We are to find in the midst of all this our opportunity for hallowing His name, for the coming of His kingdom, for the doing of His will.

The next way in which we may get wrong about the bread is in anxiety about it—over-eagerness. It is natural enough, and sometimes hard to be otherwise

but that is all the more reason that we should seek the cure which God has provided. Dependent for our life on the daily bread, unable to control the future, with many possibilities of ill that threaten us, with lives about us perhaps dearer to us than our own, is it not natural—very natural—that we should think anxiously about the daily bread? And more than natural—is it not a duty to think much of it? Is there not a word strong and stern from St. Paul, that he who doth not provide for his own house is worse than an infidel? Forethought is not foreboding. Care need not be worry. There is an anxiety which is not sin. It is *over*-anxiety against, which we have to guard—the fearful foreboding, the care that grows into the heart and makes the man unfit for labour and unfit for life. Jesus Christ taught us to deal very tenderly with this trouble of care. He sat down on the Mount and pointed to the birds and flowers, and talked about the children at home. So should we talk to these anxious ones. It is easy to hurt where we would heal, and to bruise whilst we think we are mollifying the wound with ointment. To the man who eats his last crust, to the woman who grudges the slice as she cuts it, God knows how tenderly the word must be spoken. Come, then, here is a sweet message for you: *Your heavenly Father careth, careth for you—your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.* Listen to the words of our blessed Master: “When ye pray,

say Our Father, *give us this day our daily bread.*" OUR FATHER—is it not in itself a cure for care?—speak it over softly and lovingly in the heart. *Our Father.* Ah! father, mother, have you not often sighed within yourself, "I should not mind for myself but there are the children"? Yes, indeed, there are the children; and therefore doth He bid us say, *Our Father*,—theirs as well as yours. Whence think you comes this very pity for the children and this care for them, but from the great heart of our Father in heaven? And He teaches us to pray, *Give us this day our daily bread.* He is not so all taken up in the spiritual and the sublime that He forgets the lowest needs of our nature. It is good to pass through these great petitions to the simplicity of this lowly one—"Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven." It is as if I stood a little child and saw the great palace of the King of kings in all its splendour; as if I stood amidst the ranks of seraphim and cherubim, all waiting eager for their stately service, as if I looked forth over the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them; and far beyond there reached a million worlds through which His will had sway. All is awful in its greatness, overwhelming in its vastness. What then am I and my little common daily needs! But, lo! the Almighty Father knows and takes His child by the hand, and leads me into the banqueting chamber, and I am told to look into His

face, and ask, "Give me this day my daily bread." In the Father's house there are not only cherubim and seraphim, and holy angels that do excel in strength; there is not only the great white throne spanned by the rainbow. In the Father's house *there is bread enough and to spare*. What think you, troubled one, is not this very prayer the assurance that He knows the need, and that He has the provision waiting for us? Shall the guests be invited and the great dinner bell be rung—and shall we gather to find the table empty and the guests forgotten? Do you not remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "What man is there of you whom if his son ask bread shall he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish shall he give him a serpent?" What, then, if the Father should bid his son ask bread, and when he came for it he should be left unnoticed and forgotten? Never, never, never! "*Your heavenly Father careth for you.*"

What a wonderful message of care for us comes with the corn! It is a living message fresh from the very heart of God. The coal is stored up for man's use from the beginning of the world. The iron is there waiting man's discovery and labour. But the metal may be worked out. I have seen the old engine-house stand roofless and ruined, telling of the mine exhausted. But right up against it has come the golden corn. Here is no exhaustion. Here is an energy as fresh, here is a gift as full and rich as

in the first harvest. My brother, we knock at the door of a bountiful Giver, by whom the ages have been fed, and there is enough left for thee and me. Fear not. The store is not spent, that cupboard is never empty. That bounty has not ceased. For thee and me it is true, as for any that ever lived, "*Your heavenly Father careth for you.*"

See again, *the words teach us that our Father's care about the daily bread is constant, unceasing.* Every day has as much to do with the harvest as the reaping time. It is as if our God were always thinking of us. The store has but just come when the provision is made for the fresh supply. October rains, and November frosts, and December snows, and the growing heat of summer are all leading up to the harvest. The very seasons are set, the world itself is balanced, the sun shines, the winds blow, ten thousand mysterious agencies are at work that we may be fed. Fear not. It is the joy of our bountiful Father to bless His children.

And here again the corn itself becomes a parable. Ah, how it preaches to us if we have but ears to hear. "Fear not, fear not," it seems to say; "I know what He can do. I lay in the earth a tiny seed, and I said to myself, 'What am I going to do down here, I wonder, so small and so helpless and with so many wants?' And I began to count them up. 'Let me see—first I want a root—of course I cannot do anything without a root. And really I don't see where

that is to come from. I have to take hold of the earth and to draw my nourishment out of it. And then I want a stem. I cannot grow into corn without a stem, of course. And how am I to get a stem? And here I am in a regular prison, all dark and cold. I have heard about the golden corn sporting with the sunshine and the shade, and I really cannot see how ever I am to get out of this dungeon. And then, of course, I must have the sun, and however is the sun going to find its way down here? And, oh dear, I am so little, I shall be lost.' But then came a voice that spoke cheerily to me. 'Nonsense, little one, why dost thou talk so? He who set thee here has fitted thee for thy place, and He can give thee root and stem and golden grain. And He will—He will—Fear not.' Then I thought I would wait and see—and it all came I don't know *how*, but there were the tiny roots that began to take hold of the earth, and there was the beginning of a stem—and I thought I should be corn after all.

"But I was foolish enough to be frightened again. One day I got my head far up enough to look about me and it *was* such a great world that I was in, and there were millions of us trembling together; I trembled too, and I said, 'Oh dear, I don't see where we are all to get what we want, so many of us and each so little and helpless!' And then I looked up at the sun. 'And I must have the sun, of course,' but I heard somebody say it was ninety-five millions of

miles away ; ‘ I *shall* want a long arm to reach up all that way ! And there are the clouds where the rain is—and I have not a neck long enough to drink out of them, and, of course, I shall die.’ But the voice spake cheerily again. ‘ Fear not, little one, He who brought thee so far can bring thee further. He who gave the root and stem will give thee all else.’ I was so foolish to be frightened. Because I could not get up to the sun, God sent a little sun-ray all the way down to me, all to myself, little as I was, and it warmed and gladdened my heart, and made me feel so strong. And because I could not reach to the clouds He sent a little drop just so that I could drink it, and another and another. And so I came to know what David meant when he said, the valleys are covered over with corn, they laugh and sing.”

Ah, dear soul, surely thou mayest laugh and sing too. If God so care for the children’s bread, shall He not much more care for the children !

Then for a moment or two let us look at the two other evils which may come from the wrong use of the bread. There may be *pride in the possession of it*. “ Soul, thou hast much goods laid up. How great and safe art thou ! ” But this petition smiles at our pride. *Give us this day our daily bread*. We say we are rich and increased in goods and in need of nothing. We think we are great and can command the markets of the world. We boast of our skill and knowledge, that we understand all the mysteries of

nature. And yet we have to knock at the door of the Father's house for a crust of bread. His sunshine and His rain must enrich us, or we starve. Paupers, my dear sir, really ought not to be proud, nor to speak so haughtily. Ah, stay, my friend, stay. Did you look down upon that man with a kind of contempt—a sort of inferior clay? You really ought to apologise to him. Do you know that you owe your daily bread to that man's Father! Our Father—we are members of a great family, and our common need, and common supply of the daily bread ought to bind us into a true brotherhood.

And is not this enough to smite our pride! No man is rich enough to pay his bread bill. How much owest thou for the loaf of bread? Sit down quietly and see, friend, if thou canst add it up. Shall we go back to the beginning of the world—that is nearly six thousand years. Well, it is because for six thousand years some man has gone forth every year with the plough and turned the furrow; because some hand every year has flung the seed corn; because for six thousand years some have gone forth every year to reap the corn and care for it, that you to-day have got your crust. Every mouthful of bread ought to check our pride; every loaf of bread leaves us debtor to a host of toilers.

And the other evil to which we have referred is *greed*. Let it suffice to listen to the parable of the corn once more.

How that the corn lay once in the granary, and it said within itself, lazily, "How delightful it is to lie here! I can't think, for my part, how the corn can ever like to get into the fields, and to be buried in the earth. Such a vulgar taste, to care for clods and that sort of thing. I hear the winter winds howl and the wild rain sweep, and it is so pleasant to lie here safe, sheltered, and snug." And then it slept a long sleep, waking up and yawning, and going to sleep again, which was all it had to do. But, alas! the rats and mice were busy about it, and the weasels made havoc amidst it, and the mildew got in, and it began to grow mouldy and useless. And at last it was swept out and burned. So we may live. And so is it that he who saveth his life shall lose it.

But elsewhere the corn said, "No, no: I am not to lie in a granary, but my work is to bless the world, to help to feed the hungry children, and to gladden the hearts of men, and to make them strong for noble service." And it gave itself up to the sower, and went down in the dark earth, and braved the storms and winter's frost, and rose up in new beauty increased and blest a hundredfold, and made glad the heart, and cheered the home, and blest the people, and woke the hymns of praise. So is it. We can give ourselves to Him who soweth the good seed, and for us some heart shall be brighter, some life be gladdened, and some song be stirred that else had not been heard in earth or heaven,—for he that loseth his life shall find it.

WITH BOTH HANDS

“With both hands earnestly.”—*Micah* vii. 3.

XXII

WITH BOTH HANDS

THE prophet thinks of himself as standing in some garden in the later autumn. We feel the chillness of the deserted place. The paths are strewn with dead leaves. The trees stretch up their bare, black arms to the cloudy heavens, and the winds come moaning through the place. In vain the prophet turns to the trailing vine for any lingering bunch of grapes : in vain he searches the fig tree for any fruit. But in upon the silence of the desolate garden comes the roar of the great city, now and then broken with shout and cry.

Such is the scene. The garden of the Lord is deserted, whilst the city is all eager, full of greed and grasping. And that was 2,600 years ago ! Has time stood still ? Alas ! how true is the picture in every line of it of the Church and the world to-day.

With both hands earnestly. That is how men live in the world for themselves,—for gain, for position,

for pleasure. There is the rush and the roar : no hour too early or too late ; no expenditure begrudged ; no enterprise too vast ; as if never wearied, night must flare into day. Everything that can minister to men's importance or enjoyment must be secured at all hazards, and at any cost. The world must be ransacked for treasures ; land and sea must yield their charms.

And amidst all this, the Church so often is like the desolate garden ; a thing of dead leaves and rotting stalks, without fruit or flower. And as the Blessed Lord comes to walk as of old in the garden that He planted, and to talk with His child, how often is it that there is for Him no rich cluster ! That cruel thirst of Calvary can only be assuaged by the fruits that we grow for Him. From His lips the words come with an entreaty of appeal, " My soul desireth the first ripe fruit." What if the place be lonely at His coming, with no glad response, no happy communion ; what if all be desolate or barren, a place of dead leaves only and barren trees ?

The words suggest the contrast between the energy of men for themselves and our energy for Christ. How horrible and hideous the contrast is ! It appears in one single item of our national expenditure. Here, in this Christian England, we spend nearly one hundred and forty millions of money upon intoxicating drink, and we spend less than two millions of money upon the work of the world's evangelization. It is

as if Christ had never come : as if the voice had never sounded through the ages, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Almost every man you meet shall spend sixpence or a shilling a day in every day of the week upon some luxury for himself without any twinge of conscience ; and then satisfy himself with a penny for the collection at the church ; would think himself generous if he gave a sixpenny bit ;—really noble if it were a shilling, and would scarcely survive the fact of giving half a crown all at once for some good work !

Money seems always forthcoming for palatial residences and hotels and restaurants and theatres, and their enormous cost is easily sustained, whilst the orphanages and hospitals and great charities of the land are compelled to make the most piteous appeals for help.

I suppose there are tens of thousands of pounds that change hands over every great horse race, whilst we have to plead and beg to get a paltry thousand for the relief of the poor and hungry.

If we could expect to find anywhere a life of tremendous earnestness, it surely should be in those who profess to be Christians—those who have had the light of God and eternity and the Judgment flashed in upon them. The shining of the sun puts out the fire on the hearth. Why does not this fierce

light that beats from the throne of God put out the fire of our selfishness? If any obligation could demand the utmost surrender of the life in love and service, it must be as nowhere else in the claims of that Blessed Saviour Who loved us and gave Himself for us. If anything could loose the cruel grip of the world, it surely ought to be in the force of His example, "Who was rich, and for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich." If anything could kindle and sustain a white heat of enthusiasm, it surely should be the remembrance of how that for us "He made Himself of no reputation, and humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross," to redeem our lives from destruction, and to lift us into His own likeness. Alas, how faint, how dim, how poor must be all our thought and sense of the crucified Lord, that we put our own ease before His service, and our own comfort before His glory! Alas, that a thousand things of earth should be more to us than His great love. Let us bow with shame and amazement at such black and base ingratitude.

The world about us condemns us. Look at it. By day, in the City, a vast host eager for gain: by night, in the West End, another host as eager for pleasure. And we who bear the name of Jesus Christ, and who are entrusted with His glory, often without any passionate devotion, half-hearted and dull. Everywhere about us men at work with both hands

earnestly, and we so many of us asleep. God in His mercy wake us up, even though it be by an earthquake, as He woke the jailer of old.

“With both hands earnestly.” The words suggest *those who have got no hands at all*. It is true of many, very many, it is the hard stern truth to say it of most Christian men and women in the world, for themselves they are at it with both hands earnestly, but for God they have no hands at all. Most Christians seem to take it for granted that there is no need for them to *do* anything; they go to church and join in the services, and have a creed and give to collections: what more is there?

I was casting about for an illustration that should sum up what I meant in a kind of parable, and I think I found it in the chrysalis. You know the caterpillar crawls about the cabbage leaves, often with sad proofs of his mischief. But later there comes a change in his life; he gives up his crawling and devouring ways, turns over a new leaf as we may say; crawls up the church door. I have often seen him there lodged in a convenient crevice. From his new position I daresay he looks down upon his low and degraded past with a proud contempt. “I am no more what I was,” he says complacently. “I have got much above all that,” and then, hidden in the crevice of the church porch, he goes to sleep *a chrysalis*. You see he gets a new name, and there

is so much in a new name. His old name, some tell us, was by no means a good one—the food-robber; but now he is a chrysalis, and that means something golden. Proud of his new position and his new name, he goes to sleep and dreams of the happy time when he shall fly.

Alas! it is the very living picture of very, very many. Their religion consists of a certain turn, a certain uplifting at some time in their lives—a new name, a new position, in the church porch perhaps—and then to sleep, waiting as they say until they shall “clap their glad wings and tower away to realms of everlasting day.” Their religion is a memory of what was, and a hope of what will be, with a long sleep between.

And that is not all. Bad as it is, that is perhaps not the worst. Of old it was said, “There was a man there which had a withered hand,” but of many places to-day it may be said, “There was a man there with *two* withered hands.”

In our great cities, swarming as they do with those from the country, what hosts there are who once were the happy servants of the King of Heaven—at work for Him “with both hands earnestly.” They look back, perhaps from a better social position, with envy to those happy times, for there is no happiness like the happiness of service. We are made so that we can find our only true happiness in serving others. We must go out of ourselves to get posses-

sion of ourselves, as the clapper gives the bell its tones, and the bow gives the violin its music.

A contribution to the funds of the church is a poor substitute for the gladness that was theirs of old; the hands withered, not for oneself, not for business, not for pleasure, but *only for God*, and only for any real helpfulness to others. Both hands at work everywhere else, but only here a man with both hands withered.

Such men actually pride themselves, "You see, if I don't do any good in the world, I don't do any harm." No word can speak a severer condemnation of one's self than that. Not to do good is to do harm. See how the Lord Jesus Christ put the question to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to save life or to kill?" There is nothing between these two. Not to save the life that one could save is murder.

To be indifferent when a helping hand would save a good cause, is to ruin it. To withhold a look of sympathy or a word of encouragement that would help a man to keep right, may be to destroy him. To do nothing is often the most cowardly way of doing the greatest harm that can be done. "Curse ye Meroz," said the angel of the Lord, "curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." That is the doom of the men who have no hands for God.

The time will not allow us to speak of other classes that are suggested by the text — *the left-handed men*, who are both-handed for themselves, but left-handed only for God. Everything they do here is half done, ill done, undone. Nothing but the very best can satisfy them anywhere else. No trouble is spared, no effort begrudged ; but in work for God, content to be awkward, counting it ever weariness, bungling over it, hindering almost more than helping. Angry if they are not asked to do it, and spoiling it when they do. They bring to the altar that which is torn and lame and blind. Sometimes indeed they take anybody's poor little ewe lamb to save their own flocks and herds.

But we must make haste and turn to the brighter side of the picture.

"With both hands earnestly." Here to-day, in the presence of God, let us think of the great conflict that is ever raging between good and evil, between God and sin. It is within us ; it is about us ; it is in the streets, in the business, in the social life. Nothing will do in this conflict but that we fight against it "with both hands earnestly." And to fight does not mean just to think about it, or to sigh over it. It means that we fling ourselves with all our might into the fray and risk everything on the issue.

And if we are Christ's soldiers and servants, it is a shame, a miserable shame, to be half-hearted and

feeble in this conflict. The charge rings, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Thus was it that our redemption was won "with both hands earnestly."

Do you remember that it is written, "He laid His hands upon every one of them and healed them." He might have stood in the gateway of the city: the soft light of the setting sun falling upon Him and breathing His benediction. It might have been enough to speak the word, "Be whole." So would it have been if the story had been of human invention. It were much more in keeping with the majesty of the Creator and the greatness of the Redeemer; it had saved Him so much trouble and toil. But His pitiful love *must* come and tenderly lay His hands upon every one of them, speaking the gracious word to each.

Pictures of the Saviour often represent Him as holding up two fingers, but that is not how He blesses men. Of the little children we read that He took them up in His arms, laid His hands upon them and blessed them. And for us men and for our salvation those hands were stretched upon the cross. For ever there is graven upon them the marks of that agony, and for such a Lord and such a Leader it were a shame indeed to be half-hearted.

Let us earnestly and solemnly surrender ourselves afresh to the Lord Jesus Christ for service. We cannot afford to let the world find in gain or in pleasure a greater inspiration than we can find in our religion.

We may say what we will, and profess what we will, that which we live for determines whose we are and what we are. "For me to live is Christ," cried St. Paul. As other men live for gain or pleasure, the Christian is meant to be a man who lives for Christ.

Is there anything within us that makes us weak for His great service? Anything of ill-will that blights and withers us? Is there anything that dims our vision of the Saviour and chills our love to Him? Is there any neglect, any sin of omission or commission that is enfeebling us?

To-day for His sake, and in His strength, let us have done with it. Let us grasp Him as our own "with both hands earnestly." For what Christ is to us, is exactly the measure of what we are to Him. Let us make Him once again our King afresh seated on the throne of our hearts, anew crowned with our love. We will gladly submit to His sway, and kneeling before Him we will pledge ourselves through and through, always and everywhere, in everything and before everybody, to be first of all and above all His faithful soldiers and servants whom He has entrusted with His glory.

"With both hands earnestly," means a service that is perfect freedom, not hard duty, but a resistless constraint of love: a delight to do His will.

"The love of Christ constraineth us" is the whole secret of true service.

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